

THE MOULD

GRACE KELLOGG GRIFFITH



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"AH, KATHERINE, KATHERINE!" HE SAID.

THE MOULD

BY

GRACE KELLOGG GRIFFITH

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The Mould

CHAPTER I

CLOTHES

(I)

THE Montescue School has a brilliant and widespread reputation as a moulder of young women. From its native heath, which is Boston, Massachusetts, all the way to Spokane, Washington, and from Chicago to New Orleans, it is known, not so much by its advertisements, which are small and inconspicuous, as by its annual output of charmingly distinguished alumnae. From Philadelphia to Los Angeles, Montescue's June graduates are always among January's choicest débutantes.

It never fails with a girl, they say; it has a "way," a deft mysterious touch. It will take the rawest lump of adolescent clay, and, four years later, turn it out: a delightful, graceful bit of feminine pottery.

Montescue's deploras deeply and frequently, to the mothers of its girls, and others, the rise in these days of a type of school which seems to ignore the importance of Social Ease; and which, far from helping relate the girl to her appointed life, is disjointing her and it by interesting her in social problems, democratic theories, silly and pernicious propaganda about use-

fulness, productivity, individual freedom of development, social "responsibility," and so on—topics about which January's débutante is decidedly happier and more charming if she knows nothing.

Likewise these "modern" schools seem to under-rate the ever-looming peril of the Clandestine Love-Affair. Montescue's does not underrate it. It still hides, like a grim scar on its fair fame, the memory of Rosabelle Cabot's elopement. . . . With girls such as Montescue's has charge of—heiresses to proud names and snug fortunes—the clandestine love-affair is more to be dreaded than smallpox.

All incoming and outgoing mail is opened, scrutinized and O. K.'d by Miss Montescue before delivery to the addressee or the post-box. No student can pass out of the front door, even to academic appointments, without a viséed passport. All excursions to the dentist, the dressmaker or the shops, as well as all social excursions, are rigidly and impressively chaperoned by Miss Sarah Montescue or one of the teachers.

It is Miss Sarah's boast (uttered in a tone of well-simulated deprecation) that they are "old-fashioned." As Montescue's has been for three dignified decades, so is it now. The wide-mouthed Post-War Spirit of mad license, of Freudian frankness and unseemly adolescent flippancies, may have changed all else: it has not changed Montescue's. Rouge and cigarettes, beaded eyelashes and cocktails are not even whispered of within its decorous portals; and expulsion, no less, would undoubtedly be the portion of any girl who should undertake to initiate her mates into the mys-

teries even of an eyebrow pencil. There are no "flappers" at Montescue's, or even "sub-debs." Montescue's students are "young girls" until Senior Year; and then they are "young ladies."

Nevertheless, inexplicable as is the bald fact, on a certain afternoon of a certain autumn, three of Montescue's impeccable "young girls," totally unchaperoned, were seated at Caillaux's popular Back Bay soda-fountain, consuming three paper glasses of a thirty-five-cent concoction known as a "velvet float." They had elected the counter instead of one of the pretty little tables in the rear partly because it is easier (in case of emergency) to make a successful get-away from the soda-counter than from a table, but partly also because of a certain curly-haired soda-clerk. Sex, especially adolescent sex, has a way of overleaping even the social barrier, and there are ways of carrying on a flirtation across the barrier, even without actually overleaping it. The curly-headed soda-clerk would probably give several Back Bay mothers a sudden crop of gray hair should he ever publish a volume of reminiscences.

Now it is difficult to reconcile the fact with Montescue's innocence in the matter of lip-sticks and so on, but the eldest of Professor Androwski's absentee pupils, who was quite a habitu   of Caillaux's, had undeniably, somewhere between Montescue's front door and the soda-counter, managed to achieve a very creditable make-up. With her darkened eyelids, her strange pallor, her lips crimson as blood, her oblique green glances and her air of speaking always in *double*

entendre, she was, if not a "vamp," at least a very fair imitation of one. She certainly thought she was "vamping" the curly-headed soda-fountain clerk, and the clerk was accepting her advances as a natural tribute to his manly charm. He knew she was from one of the private schools, and that her first name was Marie. As "Marie" he and his chum at the soda-counter referred to her, when discussing her. Marie's invariable companion, the scrawny little "flapper" (shades of Montescue's!) with her hair pinned up to look bobbed, was "Hattie." But this third "jane," who was with Marie and Hattie to-day, the soda-clerks had never seen before. Was she really with them?

Yes, though she sat silently consuming her complicated beverage behind the averted shoulder of Hattie, while Hattie and Marie babbled companionably along in a sophisticated jargon obviously unintelligible to her, she was yet undoubtedly with them, for Marie had had her by the arm when they entered (much, indeed, like an unwilling captive) and Hattie had paid for all three soda-checks. Yet the strange dame was undeniably a peculiar companion for the super-elegant Marie and Hattie.

She was a dark, gawky girl of perhaps sixteen, with freakish black eyebrows which met across her nose when she scowled (and she did scowl), thin, square shoulders, a flat body, and large, bare, roughened hands. Marie's and Hattie's new autumn hats, modish, tiptilted and sophisticated, fairly shrieked laughter at the naive straw that topped their companion. Their

chic autumn suits pointed the finger of scorn (though the day was warm) at her cotton frock and amorphous "jacket." The dull finish of their complexions and the neatly netted outlines of their hair rebuked her unpowdered murkiness, shiny nose, and stringy elf-locks escaping about her ears.

And as the clothes and complexions, so the manners. Marie's and Hattie's were the ne plus ultra of ease and self-possession—almost insolent, indeed, in their extremity of those qualities: while their incongruous companion's every glance and motion—her uneasy shiftings on the little chair, her painful flushes at little mishaps with the float, her furtive imitation of her companions' manipulation of spoon and straw—convicted her of the unpardonable sin. She was (as Montescue's officially put it) *Gauche*. Indeed, it might have been said (had the soda-clerks been proficient in the proper language) that she was *Gaucherie Embodied*. Instead they said, stooping under the counter and exchanging a knowing whisper, that she was a Hayseed and a Hick.

Which was true. She was a new girl at Montescue's, having come out of Vermont to enter the Junior Class. Her name was Katherine Howard. Marie and Hattie had brought her along on their little lark, not from any hospitable impulse, but because when they emerged, purposely a little late, from the Misses Montescue's dragoned door, on their way (presumably) to ensemble class at Professor Androwski's, Katherine had chanced to follow on their heels.

Marie and Hattie, after one panicky moment—but

they were determined to carry out their venture—had solved the situation. They could not trust the new girl. They had shown their amusement pretty openly at her queer clothes and awkward manners, and she would doubtless be glad enough of an opportunity to avenge herself. There was, however, one sure way to shut her lips: that was, to incriminate her equally with themselves. Precocious young persons, Hattie and Marie. They put hypocritical welcoming smiles on their lips, took Katherine each by an arm, and drew her, astonished and futilely protesting, along with them.

The country girl was no match for the city-bred young ladies. Short of casting off their arms by physical force and taking to her heels, she knew of no way to escape their coercive persuasions—so determined were they not to be escaped. She could not quite fathom their motive, but sensed that it sprang from no personal cordiality; and once in Caillaux's and their end accomplished, the young ladies assumed a demeanor toward her which justified her gloomiest forebodings. Hattie having bought her soda-check, she felt in honor bound to her hostesses. Yet even the worm will turn. Flight might be dishonorable—and undignified—but she was meditating it.

Just then a fateful event intervened. Her eyes, focussed under her beetling scowl on the image of the door which was reflected in the expansive mirror which confronts patrons of the soda-fountain, saw that door swing inward; saw two young gentlemen in gay attire enter; saw Hattie nudge Marie excitedly; saw Marie

cast a cool, oblique glance into the mirror, where it met the jocund glance of one of the young gentlemen; saw . . . but why tarry over details? One may see it oneself any day, on street-car or train, in the shop, in the park, on the door-step, at the movies, the dance, the beach: this magnetic drawing of youth to youth, without benefit of introductions, over or under or through the fence that senile convention has erected to keep them apart. Over four sundaes, gloomily served by the crestfallen curly-head, the party were shortly as well acquainted as if they had known each other from the cradle.

Katherine Howard, the poor *Gauche* one, was in a more wretched plight than ever. Should she swallow her pride and humiliation and sit silently by? Should she try to sneak out unobserved? The care-free blue orbs of one of the youths—a moon-faced child with a prep-school hat-band—roving aimlessly about as he gave comic utterance to prep-school gallantries, across the entirely averted shoulder of Hattie, encountered Katherine's gaze, fixed upon him; and that gaze was so magnificent, so incomprehensible, so darkling, so homicidal, that he paused, his baby-mouth wide open, and stared transfixed.

"What's the matter?" asked Marie, giggling. "See a ghost?"

Hattie glanced apprehensively at Katherine's image in the glass; but Katherine's eyes had dropped. A slow, furious flush mounted to her hair. She slid off her chair, turned, and holding her chin very high, moved from the self-sufficient group.

She did not go quickly enough, however, to miss Moon-Face's interested inquiry: "Who's your friend with the eyes?" or Marie's shrill disclaimer: "My lord! No friend of ours!" ("Does she look it?" tittered Hattie, parenthetically.) "One of the girls from the School—followed us in here."

It was too much! "*Followed us in here!*" She who had been cajoled, over-persuaded, downright coerced into accompanying the treacherous pair!

It seemed to Katherine that her spine was a ramrod, and that her limbs moved up and down, jerkily, getting her away from that place by inches only, the while the eyes of the four amused young people behind her bored into her back like hot points. She imagined that, as the door, reached after interminable ages, swung to behind her, bumping a tardy heel of her as the crowning mortification, a loud laugh broke out.

She stumbled blindly forward. A red mist had suddenly blotted out Boylston Street. She clenched her lean, dark hands. The nails bit into her palms. She vowed a vow: she would show them!

(2)

Just before the Christmas holidays, it is the custom of the Misses Montescue to give an annual party, the feature of which, in the eyes of the School (for the Misses Montescue's girls are, in spite of their superior heredities and environments, very much like the ordinary run of thirteen- to eighteen-year-old girls) that "boys" may be invited.

Katherine, of course, fresh from the Vermont farm,

knew no boys in Boston, and so could invite none. Neither was she sufficiently prepossessing for any of the more fortunate young belles to invite one for her. She would have liked to hide away up-stairs, but the party was considered part of the school's Social Training, and she was not permitted to do so. Instead, she was relentlessly marshaled, by the teacher who routed her out of her closet, into a hideous be-frilled white dress which suited her as ill as any attire which possibly could have been devised, and compelled to take her part in the festivities.

Her part!

Alone of all Montescue's students, she was a clumsy beginner at the art of dancing, and her part consisted in sitting in obscure corners or skulking behind merciful screens of the imported vegetation. She was miserably alone in the midst of laughing, chattering groups—groups light-hearted, as it was her right also to be, with music, pretty clothes, motion, and sex. There is no loneliness to compare with this.

At the four o'clock intermission (it was, of course, an afternoon party) she sat neglected while other girls, served by their partners, consumed, with the unspoiled appetite of youth, croquettes and peas, lobster salad, ices, little cakes, hot chocolate. But, hidden so well, she was at least spared the one unbearable humiliation: that of having some teacher lead some agonized, reluctant youth to her. . . .

When the next dance at last began, she slipped surreptitiously out to the buffet, which had appropriated a small cloakroom to the rear of the drawing-

room, and, having collected such fragments of the feast as she could seize on in a hurry, she scurried away with them to her safe retreat and appeased with them the pangs of an empty stomach, but not the pangs of an empty and passionate heart.

The dance stopped. A boisterous clapping (for youth will be served—even within the shadow of Montescue's walls) demanded the encore. The orchestra, to whom one tune doubtless comes to look like any other, indifferently took up the strain where they had left off, and continued it. Lads seized their partners again, or were seized by them, and plunged into the renewed whirl.

Katherine had not secured any ice-cream on her foraging expedition, but she longed for some. It was molded in delectable great melons; one was of a deep chocolate rind with a flaky white heart. When she had snatched her croquettes, she had observed that a slice of it was left. She was torn between desire for this seductive morsel, and a craven fear of detection in the act of purloining it. She glanced from behind the tropic clump of greenery where she was secrete*d*: the dancers were whirling . . . whirling . . . the stoic faces of the musicians as they fiddle*d* and thumped and blew looked as if they meant to continue the encore for ever and ever. She slid her empty plate into a pot of fern, slipped through a side door of the drawing-room, and, by a detour, reached the deserted buffet. The slice of melon was still there. She slid it onto a saucer, seized a spoon, and took a mouthful. Oh, rapture! Never before had

Katherine experienced the taste of such rich, chill, melting sweetness.

She heaved a long sigh, and dipped her spoon again—and just then, to her horror, came a sudden cessation of the cornet's positive assertion that the daisies wouldn't tell, a feeble burst of applause that died at birth, and then an outbursting clatter of tongues. Katherine gathered saucer and spoon to her, and prepared for flight—she knew not whither.

Too late! Staccato voices near at hand, and drawing nearer, stood out against the general clatter like figures sharply etched against a blurred background. Retreat was cut off! Katherine, the image of guilt, poised in the very act of flight, hugging to her bosom the damnatory saucer, stood transfixed, staring horror-stricken at the empty doorway. In another instant there appeared within its frame—crowning sting of fate—Marie Hunt.

Behind Marie, close over her lace-veiled shoulder, loomed the round, blond, good-natured countenance of the cavalier of the Caillaux episode, and behind these two, could be discerned Bettina Mason and a youth unknown. These four were covertly seeking a retreat withdrawn from the madding crowd. Cozily carpeted and cushioned was the staircase, it is true—a romantic nook to the eye, but only to the eye, it being most efficiently chaperoned by Miss Sarah Montescue. The buffet alone was not under surveillance; and, seeing Katherine, an innocent interloper, already in possession, Miss Hunt scowled, and came to an involuntary stop.

Katherine did not move. This simple solution of the situation did not occur to her. She stood at bay, staring ferociously at the four in the doorway.

It was the Caillaux young man who broke the tension.

"Hello!" he whispered cheerfully. "The Dame with the Eyes—at it again! Give me a knock-down, Marie!"

Marie hesitated, crimsoned, then performed the introduction with a very bad grace: "Mr. Daggett—Miss Howard."

She choked over the "Howard," and Bettina Mason, who had a sense of humor, giggled.

Katherine, aware how awkward was the jerk of her head and how inadequate the mutter of her dry lips, took the giggle to herself, and was in a rage at herself, at Fate, at Marie, even at the quite innocent Mr. Daggett.

The latter, indeed, was more than innocent: he rose gallantly, yes, downright chivalrously, to the occasion.

"May I see your card, Miss Howard?" he inquired, with a deep bend.

Her card! It came to Katherine's lips to explain that she hadn't any card—couldn't dance—she tried to think of some excuse to make instead of the confession—she saw Mr. Daggett waiting, making her ridiculous—she saw Marie's lip curling—and then, suddenly, to her horror, she heard herself blurt out, loudly and violently, "No!"

She had intended to add something explanatory, but

the sound of her own voice startled it out of her. She fled.

There was a second's blank silence; then a peal of laughter from Bettina, and Marie exclaimed shrilly, "Well, I *never!* Can you beat it?"

"Some pippin!" snickered Mr. Huntington Clarke, Bettina's escort. "Just crazy to know you better, ain't she, Baldie?"

"Baldie" had run his hands deep into his pockets, and was looking rather dashed. He rallied, however. "Gosh, she don't know what a nice little fellow I am, hey what?"

"Perhaps you'd like a chance to show her?" inquired Marie, rather acidly.

"Perhaps I would," agreed Baldie, serenely.

Bettina giggled.

Marie shot a look of blighting scorn at her. "Oh, don't mind *me!*" she remarked fiercely to Baldie.

Bettina giggled again. Marie had made herself rather odious around school by her bragging of her conquest of the impressionable Mr. Daggett, who was none other than the only son of Ames Daggett, the shoe-man, and the possessor of a little vermilion roadster, a canoe on the Charles, a motor-boat at Hull, a super-princely allowance, and a King of good fellows at the Volkstone School, which he attended more or less irregularly.

Marie flushed. "Come, Baldie," she cried bitingly, "let's go where it isn't so *noisy!*"

And, seizing him by the arm, she pushed past their former companions without a look, without an *adieu*.

(3)

It was Bettina who told the story that night in the corridor, after the "lights-out" bell, to a group from which Marie was conspicuously absent. Bettina began in a discreet whisper; but as the tale grew, under the delicate malice of her manipulation, the joy of the creator intoxicated her. Her whisper took on a thin body, shrilled excitedly, traversed the corridor, and pierced Katherine's open transom.

According to Bettina, Baldie had been very much smitten with Katherine, and Marie had been correspondingly enraged. . . .

Late that night, after the group in the corridor had dispersed, Katherine snapped on her light. She was alone in her room, for her roommate, Angela Grayson, had been permitted to go home over the weekend on account of the arrival from Italy of her brother Paul.

Under the light hung a fair-sized mirror, in which, by tilting it, one could see oneself from topknot to knees.

Katherine tilted it, and peered hopefully, almost excitedly, into its depths. . . . But no. Above a flat, harsh-white, beruffled figure, the same swarthy, impossible face peered back at her, the eager flame in its black eyes dying slowly, resentfully, out. With a swift twist of thumb and finger at the electric switch, she plunged the room into darkness. In the dark, as if darkness could blot out the image, she went to bed.

In bed, she thought of everything—even the things farthest back. What would these scornful, pattern

girls say if they knew she was the daughter of Richard M. Howard—Richard M. Howard who could buy and sell most of their fathers! What would they say if they knew that she had been born on Commonwealth Avenue? They had never tried to find out anything about her—who she was, or anything. Just because she was queer-looking and had been brought in from the country by a queer-looking, countrified old woman, her grandmother, the girls had simply let her alone. They had done worse than that! They had eyed her askance, with the unconscious cruelty of adolescence, and tittered at her blunders.

In bed, in the dark, she reddened, and clenched her fists. She would show them! Not for nothing was she the daughter of Dickie Howard, who had started his financial career as a ragged newsboy, borrowed the money for his first speculation from a colored barber, and achieved, symbol of his wealth, that vast marble palace on the Fenway! Not for nothing was she the daughter of Belle Ansella Howard, that extraordinary young woman from Vermont, who, a chambermaid at the time she had married Dickie and his millions, had generaled her way, against all the stupendous odds, into the very innermost shrine of Boston society. The cataclysm of divorce and suicide which had ended her amazing career had banished Katherine, then a child of seven, to the country and her grandmother's care (Dickie Howard's palace, after his wife left it, not being a suitable place in which to bring up a child); and the country had put its thumb-mark on Katherine, but had not destroyed her heritage. And her heritage

was the will and the power to achieve! She would show them!

(4)

It was Angela who pointed out the way.

One evening as Katherine was changing from an unbecoming chocolate-brown school-dress made by Miss Brixton of Millersville, to a still less becoming baby-blue dinner-frock with a sash, bought ready-made in Boston by her grandmother and her, after they found she would need it, she remarked vigorously to Angela, "I hate clothes. I wish people went naked."

Angela was slipping a girlish little creation of crêpe de chine, as naive and as pink and sweet and perfect as a peach-blossom, over her head, and she paused to disentangle a crystal bead from her hair before replying, sensibly, "You wouldn't say that if you had some pretty clothes."

The psychological soundness of this remark struck Katherine at once. She gazed reflectively at Angela.

"Most people's looks are all a matter of clothes," continued Angela, twisting herself before the mirror on the wall under the electric bulb, in the difficult endeavor to see her fair hair, which, fluffed softly and girlishly out from under a heavy coronal braid, made a bright halo about her face. She looked, for the moment, like a stained glass angel in a church-window.

Katherine saw this, and, in the mirror beyond, she saw the fair, pretty nape of Angela's neck, just where the big bow of black taffeta ribbon was pinned across the roots of the coronal braid. And beside this grace-

ful, blond image she caught a glimpse, in the background, of her own swarthinness, with those black brows and gloomy black eyes.

Angela seemed to divine her thought. "It's all in dressing to your type," said the wise girl. She tucked to place the strand of the halo which the hook had dragged out. "Now you, for instance, are an unusual type, and you need very careful dressing. I would love to have a free hand to see what I could do with you."

"Do you mean you would be willing to help me buy myself some proper clothes?" asked Katherine, without indirection.

Angela had not meant anything in particular, but the idea at once appealed to her. She loved to work constructively on her mates. And toward Katherine, so raw, so unformed, she suddenly felt the yearning of the potter to his clay.

(5)

Katherine and Mr. Archibald Daggett, thanks to Marie's care, did not meet again for several months; and meanwhile Montescue's was shaping Katherine up rapidly. She was learning to dress, to dance, to swim, to skate, to play tennis, to talk, and to calculate her effects.

Montescue's used a large back court, surrounded by a high wall, for their Senior Class-Day exercises. Japanese lanterns, strung across it, ready for the evening lighting, bobbed festively, and a little stage had been erected to be used for the Junior-Senior play.

Marie had not invited Baldie to the play, because Katherine was to be Orlando, in Lincoln-green, the rôle which Marie (rather prematurely) had told Baldie she herself was to have. Besides, Marie had never forgotten the Christmas dance episode, and she did not wish to have the improved Katherine Howard thrust thus forcibly on Baldie's notice.

Consequently when Mr. Daggett did arrive, for the class-reception which followed the play, not a thought was in his head of the Miss Katherine Howard whose eyes had once made such a fiery impression upon his susceptible soul.

It was morning, and Baldie was got up like the lilies of the field, in a natty green coat, white flannel trousers with cuffs, green silk hose and gleaming red shoes, a pale green silk shirt, a flowered scarf, and a white hat with a Volkstone band of old rose and silver gray.

His friend Huntington Clarke, who had entered Volkstone's the same year as Baldie, but, like most of the rest of the class, had long since passed on without him and was now a freshman at Harvard, met him, clad in similar regalia, at the tall iron gate, for once unlocked, but guarded by a severe young woman who demanded credentials of all who sought to enter.

"What ho!" cried Baldie, admiringly, as he eyed his friend.

They linked arms, an odd couple: Tony Clarke with his lean frame, thin face, and sharp eyes; Baldie with his stocky bulk, round, good-natured visage, and mild blue orbs.

"What price gentlemen's haber ——" began the latter; but the piquant inquiry was never completed, for at this moment Baldie caught sight of a girl standing alone, but not lonesomely, at the end of the paved path, looking at the gay, lantern-decked scene in the court beyond.

This girl, against the old brick wall and evergreen hedge, with the gay-colored paper globes dancing overhead, was a picture. In the wrong clothes, she might have looked flat and gawky; in the dress she was wearing—a soft, silky thing of wide stripes of vivid rose and white—with white buckskin pumps that arched her insteps and called attention to her slim ankles, she was just lithe and boyish. That effect was carried farther, too, by the way she had thrust her hands into the pockets of the fluttery skirt.

Baldie saw her in profile. She had the fine open shoulders and deep chest of the tennis-player; her skin was dark and healthy as if with the tan of summer sun and salt wind; her black hair, soft and dry, had not been tortured into waves, but had been left beautifully straight. It was done the way Nazimova wore hers in "*Hedda Gabler*," and it showed the fine shape of the girl's head. The lift of her firm chin compelled attention to her features. She had the straight brow, the fine nose and keen nostrils of the Arab; but her lips were not so full. She had queer black brows which, when she concentrated her gaze, as now, drew together across the bridge of her nose.

Baldie gripped his friend's arm. They stopped short.

"See that dame?" inquired Baldie, in awe-struck tones, indicating the motionless girl. "Oh, boy! Lead me to her!"

Huntington glanced carelessly at the young lady. She did not appeal to his taste at all.

"And have Marie sink her claws in me?" he retorted, languidly. "Thanks! Nothing doing!"

Baldie was still gazing. "Tony," he said lyrically, "that's my girl!"

Tony lifted skeptical eyebrows. Though only nineteen, he knew the world.

At this moment, the rose-and-white-striped girl moved. She turned and looked back, down the path toward the gate. Her gaze slid smoothly, blankly across Tony Clarke, as if he had not been. On Baldie, it flickered a moment, just a moment. The queer black brows seemed to draw together, just for an instant. Then the black-eyed gaze, serene, impersonal, passed on to the gate. A credit to Montescue's, this girl. Nine months only had Montescue's had her, and already she was shaping up to the pattern.

Baldie's jaw, meanwhile, had dropped. By nothing else about her could he have guessed her identity; but by the eyes he knew her. Bold-hearted, in the face of the probable snub, Baldie stepped up and doffed his beautiful hat. He grinned appealingly.

As the black eyes turned a glance of cool, very cool, inquiry upon him, the mild blue eyes pleaded for remembrance—and at the same time bade her to pretend she did not remember him—if she dared!

"How do you do, Miss Howard!" crowed Baldie.

A slight red tinged Katherine's dark skin. She hesitated. Then she thought of Marie. She held out a hand, in the becoming boyish manner.

"How do you do!"

Baldie grasped the hand heartily.

"Bet you don't remember me!"

"'Bet' I do!" She mocked him.

"Bet a five-pound box of chocolates you can't say my name!" A crafty youth, Baldie!

"To a pair of gloves. I take you—Mr. Archibald Daggett!"

Baldie blushed as red as a red, red rose.

"Say, that's great!" he said. . . .

Then he remembered Huntington Clarke, to introduce him, and turned around. But Tony had diplomatically vanished.

So Katherine "showed them." In her rose-and-white frock, hands in her pockets except when Miss Montescue or Miss Sal were looking, Mr. Archibald Daggett, resplendent in all his glory of cuffed trousers and gleaming shoes and white hat and flowered tie, beside her, Katherine made the tour of the yard; and all the School saw her; and all the School knew that Marie's day, with Baldie, was done.

CHAPTER II

A HEDDA GABLER COIFFURE

(1)

By May of the following year, Montescue's pointed to Miss Katherine Howard (neatly contrasting her with the uncouth lass who had come to them out of Vermont) as an Achievement. They talked, in faculty meeting, of the "three periods" in Miss Howard's personal development. These were, pedagogically expressed, (1) the *gauche* period, (2) the unruly period, (3) the period of voluntary yielding to formative agencies, and of being brought into proper shape.

Of these, the unruly period had been the most strenuous for Montescue's. Katherine, set free from the bonds of *gaucherie*, had revealed herself as a clumsy hoyden or tomboy, too full of life, a hilarious young dynamo running wild in their prim midst.

Montescue's, however, had had experience with "the type." Sagaciously, instead of trying to break her, they kneaded her. They insinuated ideas to the effect that pranks—like sliding down the rope fire-escape, dressing up dummies to scare the Freshmen, arranging bags of flour to drop on the heads of unsuspecting virtuous proctors, and setting off the fire-alarm at midnight—were very childish and silly. At seventeen it is intolerable to be considered childish.

So Katherine, thus justifying the Montescue policy, had voluntarily left childish things and entered period (3).

By spring of her second and final year at Montescue's, she was a girl whom anyone would turn to look twice at. She no longer needed advice from Angela in "dressing her type." The pupil had gone beyond the teacher. It was not all in the clothes, either. She had an air of never seeing the *hoi-poloi* that was positively fascinating. Street-car conductors and taxi-drivers simply did not exist; porters, shop-girls and waitresses were a sort of automatic device: you placed a coin and pressed a directing button, so to speak. Even her associates sometimes felt themselves effaced from the picture. And as the human tendency is to kiss the foot that spurns us, the new Katherine Howard (Dickie Howard's heiress) was extremely popular, especially with the younger girls. There was a sort of cult of Katherine Howard, in the School: an Imitation of Katherine Howard.

Montescue's, however, like most quick-and-sure-process agencies, had not done a very thorough job. Two years, despite the apparent contradiction by visible results, is really too short a time to begin at the inside of a human being and work clear out to the surface. If visible results are wanted, it is necessary to begin, as Montescue's did, on the outside and work in—as far as time permits.

Time had not permitted them to get very far in. The dynamo had not been hitched up to anything: it was still running wild; only that instead of sliding

down fire-ropes and getting caught, Katherine was now cutting "ensemble" and joy-riding in Baldie Daggett's little roadster—and not getting caught. She knew how to enter a room, how to greet a visiting parent, how to make conversation, how to eat asparagus, strawberries and spaghetti—in short she possessed a pattern outfit of deportment: but on informal occasions she was, more often than not, rude, insolent, and unmannerly. She had successfully maintained a passing average in History, Mathematics, Literature, Bible and the others; but the little brood of the usual heresies hatching out in her adolescent brain were unscotched. She boasted herself a scornful Atheist, a cynical disbeliever in love and marriage, a creature who had triumphantly repudiated the claims of all moral and social codes, a votary of Self and the Grand Good Time. Not that she had ever *done* anything, of course; her repudiations were all purely intellectual. . . .

(2)

The air was buzzing with everybody's plans for "after Commencement." Angela was to have a quiet home coming-out in the fall, at a simple tea to which her mother would ask her own friends and a few of Angela's. Marie, about January, had the Somerdome Plaza green ballroom and suite engaged for a gorgeous début with some five thousand invitations to be issued to people (many of whom would be unable to place her) and hired automobiles to meet the trains from New York, Washington and points south on which

should be expected to arrive the personages who should save the Boston affair from "provincialism."

Hattie's family, of course, were aiming to strain themselves to give Hattie a social start as near like Marie's as they could manage; then the two girls, Hattie as a sort of unofficial companion, were going "across" with Marie's mother and an aunt. Bettina had already, as she expressed it, with her giggle, "leaked out," so there was no use in making a pretence at a formal début; but it would be her first real "season," just the same, and gold slippers and French posies on tulle flounces figured prominently in her conversation, and her feet were always twinkling down the dull corridors in the latest dance-steps.

Maizie Leonard, who was much younger than the other girls of the class and obliged to mark time socially for two years before she could come out, was being dispatched to a French Convent—from which she confidently expected to elope by a rope-ladder and marry a handsome young Viscount or somebody equally romantic and eligible. Bess Freelyn was off for college in September, and was collecting pennants and sofa-pillows in thrilled preparation. Even Estelle Houghton, a charity-pupil at Montescue's, had managed to get secretly married to a millionaire Freshman at Harvard and thus to throw a glamor of romance about her otherwise plain and uninteresting self.

But Katherine!

Her schooling was paid for by special dispensation; but, her schooling being finished, she was, so far as she knew, to revert automatically to Millersville, Ver-

mont, and the farm. She did not even know whether her allowance—which had begun with her matriculation at Montescue's—would cease or not when she severed her connection with that institution.

If there were anything she could do to support herself and stay in the city! But there was nothing. Montescue's was not preoccupied with relating to life the class of girls who must expect to earn a living. There was not one skilled paid occupation for which Katherine was qualified. Millersville loomed up: inevitable!

"Why so silent, beloved?" Bettina asked, one evening, during a conclave in which all the Seniors except Katherine had been talking rosily, two or three at a time.

After the Seniors had dispersed, all but Bettina, whom a secret curiosity held, Katherine told Bettina why she had been silent. She laid open to Bettina the nightmare situation in which she found herself: a child of the metropolis (she meant, of course, Boston) exiled and then called back, and now — She groaned. She sketched, impressionistically, for Bettina, Millersville and the Farm.

"Why," suggested Bettina, practically, "don't you write to your father?"

"My father!" echoed Katherine, startled.

So perfect all these years had been the secretarial insulation between her father and herself, that the idea of its being even possible to communicate directly with him had never till now entered her head.

"Oh, I—I couldn't!" she gasped; but even as she

spoke, she knew in the depths of her heart that she could—and would. A vision flashed across her mind: the vast, white palace on the Fenway—vistas of high-ceiled, ornate rooms—of silent-footed, respectful-mannered servants—— Suppose—*suppose*——!

“I’ll do it!” she said.

So, in midnight conclave, behind a transom muffled with a woollen skirt, the two friends drafted a masterpiece of the epistolary art; copied it; addressed it as “Personal” with a heavy flourish; stamped it, sealed it; and, at the first opportunity, consigned it surreptitiously to the care of the United States Government. The Rubicon was crossed.

(3)

The fateful missive, after passing through the hands of the requisite number of government employees, reached Richard Howard, who was, at the moment, seated at a mahogany desk in a sumptuous private office on State Street, tête-à-tête with his private secretary, with whom he was taking up his Monday morning’s mail.

The confidential secretary, whose business it was to distinguish between personal and personal, handed him Katherine’s letter with a rather queer expression of countenance.

Dickie glanced at the heavy, expensive note-paper, sniffed the very faint hint of fragrance (much fainter than Dickie was accustomed to in his communications from ladies), noted the bold and carefully sophisticated unfamiliar superscription, slid the note out of the

opened envelope and read: "My dear Father: You will doubtless be very much surprised to receive this letter ——"

Dickie was very much surprised. The possibility of any direct communication between him and his former wife's daughter (that was the way he usually thought of Katherine when he thought of her at all, rather forgetting his own share in her) had always been as far from Dickie's imagination as from Katherine's. Yet here he was, reading a letter from her!

Not that there was anything startling about the letter, which merely stated that the writer was about to complete her course at the Misses Montescue's School; that she was more grateful than words could express for her father's generosity in sending her there and in providing her with such a generous allowance; that she hoped she had turned out a credit to him (this was a crafty touch of Bettina's); that she hoped he would come to her Commencement, as all the girls were to have parents there and she would like to have a father (the pathos was Bettina's, too).

After prolonged deliberation, the collaborators had decided not to broach the topic of the Farm in this preliminary epistle. It was signed: "Your affectionate daughter" ("You're willing to be affectionate, if he comes across, aren't you?" Bettina had giggled, in reply to Katherine's protest against this sentimentality).

Dickie whistled—then scowled—then smiled.

He tossed the note back to his secretary.

"Say I'm sorry. Can't come to the party. Say I

shall be in New York. Get her a present and have it sent."

The secretary, in the cabalistic characters that secretaries employ, made this memorandum on the back of the missive freighted, alas, with such glowing young hopes.

Having considered the rest of his morning's mail, Dickie turned to the reports of the foreign markets; but before long he realized that he was not getting his usual degree of concentration. The meaning of certain figures escaped him. He caught himself re-reading them mechanically.

"What the blinkety-blank is the matter with me?" demanded Dickie, at last, stirring up his papers with an irritated but aimless hand.

As if only awaiting this question, there arose before his mind's eye a vision of Belle Ansella, as he had not thought of her for years.

Belle Ansella!

He had never been happy with her. "My one mistake"—that was how he had once, after the divorce, though before the suicide, jocosely referred to her.

Still, at this moment, the dim sweetness of her form, her remembered reticences, the level gaze of her eyes at him out of the twilight past, moved him unaccountably. He recollected, too, a straight, well-set-up little person of whom he used to be very proud in those days—his daughter.

And now his daughter, for fifteen years a mere name, at best a vague memory, a light responsibility to be attended to through his employees, had suddenly

become flesh and blood and personality—and written him a letter—inviting him to her Commencement!

“Grover!” he said to his secretary.

“Yes, sir,” murmured the secretary, whipping out his pencil and note-book.

“That letter from my daughter ——”

“Yes, sir?”

“Say I can’t come to Commencement, but I’ll call and see her next Wednesday at four. Put it on my calendar.”

(4)

Dickie’s secretary’s letter threw Bettina, when she received the news, into a high state of anticipation.

“He’s coming to look you over, you see,” she told Katherine. “He hasn’t compromised himself. Then if he likes you—all right. If he doesn’t like you, this can be the end. He doesn’t intend, as they say, to buy a pig in a poke.”

Bettina meditated. “I wonder how we would better get you up?” she mused.

By noon of Wednesday, Katherine was in a feverish state of excitement. Everything hinged on the next few hours! Everything hinged on how she should carry through the interview! The great white palace—or the farm: it was up to her. She had her chance. If she failed—her mind shrank from a contemplation of the dull gray future.

She changed her dress three times; and she and Bettina, who was officiating, nearly had a brainstorm trying to decide between an *ingénue* coiffure (hair

softly waved, parted on one side, and gathered at the nape of the neck by a girlish ribbon) or the more sophisticated and also more becoming Hedda Gabler arrangement. Katherine remembered her father vaguely as a big, bulky, jovial man with a red face—she was familiar with his features from a newspaper picture of him which she possessed. It seemed possible that the ingénue might make the stronger appeal to a big, red-faced jovial sinner; but on the other hand, Hedda was more likely to make him realize that his daughter was grown up, ready and capable of creditably taking her place in his home—as the mistress of it.

The whole School realized the importance of the occasion: Katherine Howard's unknown multi-millionaire father was coming to see her! Katherine might be installed, after June, in that splendid marble palace on Commonwealth Avenue—as mistress! What dignity! What romance!

Three little Freshmen proudly performed the menial duties of her toilet; a fluttering ring of satellites helped Bettina decide, finally, on the Hedda coiffure; the wealthy Miss Quimby of Wollaston, who had more money than other assets, and more social aspirations than money, insisted on loaning her a diamond crescent brooch; a chambermaid, quivering with excitement, brought up the expected card (unusual formality) on silver. Even Montie, after having bid the prodigal father the rather chilly welcome which she felt was appropriate from the female guardian of the virtue of thirty young girls to a notorious transgressor,

shut herself up with Sal in their private sitting-room and condescended to a ripple of excitement.

Thus it was that when Katherine came down, the drawing-room was occupied by but a single figure: that of a small, pousy quiet little man, very gray.

Where was her father—the big, bulky, jovial sinner? This was not—could not be—yet, of course, as he rose and came toward her, she knew it was. She recognized his features—from the newspaper cut.

Bettina had coached Katherine very thoroughly on the interview, but this unexpected discrepancy between the father she had expected to meet and the one who now addressed her, completely knocked her opening speech out of her head.

In a flurry, she held out her hand.

There was a dead silence for one terrible moment.

Dickie had been unconsciously visualizing what he would have called a “flapper,” and when this tall young lady, half a head taller than himself, and full of dignity, advanced upon him, he was as much taken aback as Katherine herself. In the business world and in the social underworld, Dickie was noted for the aplomb with which he met untoward situations; in good society, however, he had rather lost his self-confidence.

Then, too, Katherine, with her direct, unconsciously severe gaze, her erect carriage and appearance of extreme self-possession, reminded him forcibly of Belle Ansella. Just so had Belle Ansella looked, the day she found him kissing the parlor-maid in the coat-closet.

And, finally, Dickie had, more or less unconsciously, meditated a fatherly kiss and a jocular greeting—which were obviously rendered impossible by his daughter's dignity, severity, superior stature and Hedda Gabler coiffure. Not to mention her outstretched hand.

Dickie grasped the hand hastily, and dropped it as hastily.

"Well ——" he began. Then, realizing that he must finish his sentence, he cleared his throat and added: "You're my daughter."

Here was Katherine's chance to control the situation. She had but to retort merrily, "So it seems! How do you like me?" and all were well.

But she had been, alas, too thoroughly coached. It made her self-conscious. She was oppressed, too, by the necessity of living up to the Hedda Gabler coiffure and saying something cleverly sophisticated. Alas, the *Pride of Montescue's—stuttered!*

"Yes, I—I am." Then she blushed furiously.

Dickie gazed at her, rather oppressed. "You're some big girl!"

Katherine opened her mouth—and closed it. Precisely, she commented to herself, like a fish.—The reflection did not help to put her at her ease.

In deep silence, Dickie sat down. Katherine followed suit—in silence. They cast about for something to say; and the longer the silence lasted, the harder it was to break.

Dickie it was who actually took the plunge.

"Well," he said, boldly, "you're almost through school."

Here was a splendid opening! Bettina had prophesied it, and had rehearsed Katherine in the exactly right reply. Katherine therefore stuttered again: "Yes, I—am. Almost through." And tears of mortification welled up to her eyes.

"Like it here?"

"*Remember! You must put it across—or buy your ticket to Millersville!*" Bettina's parting admonition, hissed into Katherine's ear at the head of the stairs, echoed now through her brain. She gulped—recovered herself—heard herself answering: "Yes, very much—only it's all going to be over so soon——"

Thus, having missed Opportunity's forelock, she strove to get a fingerhold on his receding bald-spot. Effort proverbially futile! The unconscious Dickie, persistently interested in studies, classes, grades and teachers, constantly foiled her repeated efforts to bring the conversation gracefully around to the point from which she could launch out on the subject of the Dreadful Farm. The trouble with conversational finesse, as with these printed manuals of polite conversation, is that the other person must know the proper responses or the whole thing goes to pot.

In vain did Katherine, the Pride of Montescue's, try to lead the conversation back to the point at which it had started: Dickie's heavy interest in things academic prevailed. Straight down the middle of a conversational lane that had no turning, he plodded. . . .

By and by he flashed out his watch and announced that it was time to be going. And the Farm had not been mentioned!

Then Katherine underwent a sudden revulsion of feeling. How poor a creature was this, to hold her fate in his hands! She had unconsciously cherished an imaginary portrait of her father posed as the stern-browed, grim-jawed, lean-flanked romantic Ruthless Villain, taking his pleasures remorselessly and egotistically; the marks of them showing in deep lines graven from nostrils to the corners of his mouth, and in graying patches over his ears. Such a father, Katherine, with a really delightful freedom from conventional moral prejudices, could quite have admired. But this paunchy little victim of his own wine-suppers, this good-natured dupe of little gold-diggers—faugh! . . . That was the way Katherine felt about it.

Dickie rose. He was going. Let him go! To stoop to ask anything of him was impossible.

Then, just as he was at the very door, she again remembered Bettina's parting and highly amused injunction: "*Don't forget! It's success—or the farm!*"

"Father!" she stammered, at his back.

He turned questioningly.

No hesitation now! Her words rushed forth in a torrent. "I don't want to go back to the farm! I can't ——"

She stopped suddenly, chilled by Dickie's expression. The thought flitted across her mind that perhaps Dickie was not so often the dupe of the little gold-diggers as she had thought. She also perceived, as if

her eyes had just opened, that though the lips of the face which now silently confronted her might be self-indulgent to the point of weakness, the chin thrust forward obstinately and the jowls had a bulldog set. If the Dickie who had been sitting in the Misses Montescue's reception-room exchanging conversational inanities with his daughter was the social pariah, the Dickie who now scrutinized her was the Dickie who had achieved, out of a penniless boyhood, a marble palace on Commonwealth Avenue.

She cringed as this Dickie's eyes, no longer vacuous, focussed on some page within her brain, reading it. Yet, in the midst of her shame and confusion, she felt a thrill of pride. This was her father! Her soul acclaimed him.

"Oh," said Dickie, quizzically, after a few seconds, "so that was it!"

He turned and walked out.

Dickie was hard hit.

He would by no means have admitted it, but the social outcast had been touched by the wish of his little girl—his innocent little girl—to see him; to see her father. Unconsciously he had sentimentalized about it. He was, after all, a lonely little man. . . .

He had rather fancied the picture of himself sitting decorously in a boarding-school parlor discussing lessons and grades with his daughter, precisely like any other father of a boarding-school daughter! He felt a great sentimental nausea at his present mode of life; a longing for something simpler and cleaner. He hovered on the verge of a mad resolve to cut out the

whole business of his nonsense, to clean out his house, and take his little girl home with him to keep him straight the rest of his days.

As he paused in the drawing-room door, he was flirting with this idea. And just then, behind him, Katherine had blurted out the disingenuous secret of her motive in seeking her dear father's acquaintance—for all the world like—a gold-digger.

(5)

Perhaps he was too hard on her. It must only be pleaded, in extenuation, that Katherine had touched a sensitive spot in her father's otherwise fairly well calloused exterior. Somebody was always trying to "do" Dickie. His appearance of good-natured weakness was so tempting. Nobody, it seemed, ever approached him except with some ulterior motive that, more or less directly, had his pocketbook as its objective. And now his daughter, his little girl, had done it.

Of course, too, he had no background for Katherine's action. It loomed up, bald, unlovely, fatally familiar in its outlines, quite unsoftened by any insight into the real travail of young soul which had brought it forth.

As for Katherine, she ran up-stairs, brushed aside the eagerly curious waiting cohorts of the faithful, rushed into her room, banged the door, locked it, and, flinging herself upon her bed, wept long and bitterly.

She was ashamed: that was the chief ingredient of her anguish. She had conceitedly despised her fa-

ther, and then he had suddenly showed her how great was her mistake.

Then she was, of course, terribly disappointed. She had been fostering fair hopes—aided and abetted by her flattering satellites—in which the white Fenway palace had stood like a goal of dreams. And now all these hopes were laid low, and the white palace, like a castle in Spain, had vanished.

And finally, there was, curiously enough for such a self-sufficient young Epicurean, underneath all the rest, a queer, lonely ache. Almost in one and the same moment, that moment when the real Dickie had faced her and looked into her cowering soul, she had gained—and lost—a father.

Bettina analyzed the situation with fair accuracy.

“It was the Hedda Gabler coiffure,” she sighed. “We should have got you up in pigtails and a bow. . . .”

CHAPTER III

A WILL AND THE WAY

(I)

THE sooty two-coach "local" shrieked warning of its approach, rattled across a country roadway, and hic-coughed itself to a standstill beside a plank platform and a small ginger-colored shed.

A conductor in shirt-sleeves popped his head in at the door of the coach in which the single passenger was seated, and announced: "Mi'rsville! Mi'rsville!"

As if Katherine, morosely gazing out through a dirty window-pane, did not recognize the place! It had not changed! There was the rusty baggage-truck, setting in exactly the same spot as when she had last seen it, two years ago. There was the same loose plank in the platform on which the occasional stranger had stubbed his toe for the last five years or more. There was the immodestly conspicuous outhouse to which the platform led, adorned with the same chalked legends—perhaps a few had been added. There was the same row of inquisitive loafers perched along the top rail of the unpainted fence which was designed to keep pedestrians from tumbling off the platform down into the main street of Millersville. There were the same dirty pipes, the same quids of tobacco, the same puddles of brown spit.

And down the lower level of the road, she could see the grocery store and post-office, in worse need of paint by two years; next them, the ice-cream parlor with the same fly-specked pink crêpe paper window-hangings; next that, Roper's notion-store; all of them that same dirty ginger-color, as if Millersville had once purchased its paint at wholesale and never got any since; and behind and beyond this ginger-colored hub, stretching out as far as eye could see, the dreary farms.

It was all even worse than she had remembered.

A jocose brakeman entered the coach and informed Katherine that this was the end of the line—unless she wanted to go back with 'em. Bump, bump, went something on the platform. It was one of her trunks.

Clutching several magazines, a mammoth box of chocolates, a novel and three or four wilted bunches of flowers to her—parting tributes from Baldie Daggett and several admiring schoolmates—Katherine hurried down the aisle, out onto the sooty platform of the coach, and down its steps.

The loafers nudged each other, and puffed or spat more vigorously, according to their respective occupations. Though they would hardly have recognized this elegant young lady as the wild, raw girl who had taken the train for Boston under their eyes less than two years ago, they were in no doubt as to her identity. Everybody in Millersville knew that old lady Hicks was expecting her granddaughter to-day.

"Hrrr-h'm!" said a fence-rail spectator.

Katherine glanced at the fence-rail—one of those

glances which efface by looking through. She was superb, magnificent, in an expensive gray light-weight suit, with a hat that beaked down over her brows in front, and flared up in back like a peacock's tail; with an arm full of the luxurious perquisites of wealthy travelers, and with violets in her bosom, the silken tassels of the cord which bound them, swinging in careless elegance to the lowest button of her suit-coat. She was superb; superb, magnificent, insolent.

Without troubling to recognize any old acquaintances who might be on the fence-rail, otherwise than by the effacing glance, she gave her trunk-checks to the baggageman and set out down the dusty road to the farms.

Yes, none of it had by any chance changed for the better. Just as always—the fields, the fences, the angular, stupid houses, the unkempt chickens scratching in the road and pausing to glance inquisitively at her, heads on one side; the clutter of farm-machinery, decrepit wagon-bodies and sleigh-runners, wash-tubs and hogsheads, rusted junk and weather-beaten lumber in the barnyards; the barns and outhouses, some compact and prosperous-looking, some straggling, dilapidated, with sagging roofs and gaping walls, “shored up” perhaps with worm-eaten timbers; but all of them ugly; none of them, by any accident, achieving picturesqueness. And in the dooryards were barelegged urchins, or an occasional frowsy woman who turned and stared at her as she passed.

This was the beginning of Grandma Hicks's property now, at this fence-corner. It was a good prop-

erty: a big farm, as Eastern farms go. Katherine gazed across its carefully cultivated acres with a gloomy scorn. As in the fable, the comfortable affluence of the old village mouse looked very unattractive to the arrogant young relative from the city.

Now she came in sight of the flat-faced, box-like white house, with the green blinds and the heavy gloom upon it of too many trees set too close to its walls. How well she knew the house, and its inner dimness, and the musty smell of upholstery that had been damp a score of years and never dried out!

In the road, near the white gate in the green box-hedge, stood a figure. It was Katherine's grandmother.

A wave of self-pity swept over Katherine. Why had Fate given her those two glorious years, if she was to come back—to this?

Her grandmother did not wave her apron; she simply stood waiting by the gate—a short, squat, sturdy figure. Life had been hard for her. Another woman—a common, vulgar woman, at that—had taken the husband of her youth away from her even before her baby was born. That baby, grown a young girl, had been taken from her by the lure of the city; petted by the city; and then tossed aside, a broken creature who had to die. Yet she had never been able to take time for emotion: for upwards of fifty years she had had to be the man and woman both, of the farm. She had fed the hired hands in the house and worked with them in the fields.

When the little Katherine, at seven years of age,

had been sent to her, the old woman had welcomed the burden with a sort of passionate yearning toward the child; but this yearning and passion had been inarticulate. The habit of self-repression held. And the little Katherine had been a hard child to show affection to—shy and stiff and cold. Then, as Katherine had grown older, they had grown (as people who live together must do, if they cannot grow nearer together) farther and farther apart. Mrs. Hicks's narrow, positive ideas and a sort of quiet obstinacy in her make-up irritated the young girl almost to a frenzy at times; while Katherine's wildness and total lack of any sense of responsibility toward her school, herself, her grandmother or the farm tasks, sometimes alarmed and sometimes antagonized Mrs. Hicks. There was this difference, however, in their attitude; the farther apart they drew, the deeper did a poignant regret strike into the grandmother's heart, the more wistfully did she yearn to draw closer to her granddaughter; while Katherine, on the other hand, did not miss what she had never experienced, had no sense of loss, did not care. In the constantly recurring tug of wills, she was only interested in getting her way.

Now as they met at the gate, each instinctively criticized the other in the first glance. In the back of Katherine's head was the group of Montescue mothers: Angela's mother, frail, delicate, exquisite; Marie's mother, sumptuous, regal; Bettina's mother, plump, pretty, dainty; Bess Freelyn's mother, distinguished and haughty. And all of them beautifully dressed. . . . Against this background she felt as if she

saw her grandmother for the first time, pitilessly revealed. . . . And, while this was going on in one part of her consciousness, she saw, with another part, that her grandmother was criticizing her: did not admire the beaked-and-flaring hat, did not at all appreciate the lines of the expensive gray suit, did not approve of the extravagant armful of light reading and bonbons.

"Well, Kathy," said her grandmother, then, with a sort of a smile and a sigh.

"Well, Grandma," said Katherine. She bent to receive her grandmother's kiss.

In silence they entered the house. Nothing in old Mrs. Hicks's demeanor indicated that she was overjoyed to have her granddaughter back; Katherine's manner repelled any demonstrations more frigidly than ever. But Katherine's old room had been done over. There was a fine new paper, covered with large blue roses, on the walls. There was fresh paint on the woodwork. There were new lace curtains at the windows. There was a new carpet, of lavish design, on the floor. The cumbrous old black walnut bed had been replaced by one of shining brass—with a real hair mattress.

And as Katherine was taking off her hat and coat, her grandmother brought in a pitcher of hot water for her to wash in. . . .

(2)

Katherine did not reappear till supper-time. She looked pale; her eyes were ruby-rimmed; her nose,

for all its courageous front of powder, showed the glaze of grief. The done-over room had been the last straw. It was all so hopeless.

Grandma Hicks saw the telltale signs, and her old heart ached. What was the matter with the young folks nowadays? For almost seventy years she had lived on this farm which had been her father's before her: it was bone of her bone, marrow of her marrow. Here Handsome Ansel had courted her during the brief, impetuous season of his love; here she had been married; here her baby, Belle Ansella had been born. She was like an old tree, rooted in this soil; to transplant her would be to kill her. . . . And she looked back at the corn-huskings, the quilting-parties, the barn-raisings, the sings, and thought to herself that young folks in those days had had good times aplenty; but young folks these days did not want such homespun times. One by one, the sons and daughters of the farms were drifting to the towns and the cities; new people—"book-farmers"—were taking over the old places. A book-farmer named Mr. Walton had taken over old Sol Price's, which adjoined her own. It was enough to make old Sol turn in his grave.

And what of Hicks farm? After her death, would Kathy carry it on? A sudden fear gripped the old heart. The old place would pass out of the family—as all the old places were doing—some book-farmer would come in and turn everything upside down——

"What's this?" Katherine's voice, sharp with excitement, interrupted her musings. The girl was

reaching for a long white envelope which had been set on the clock-shelf so as not to be forgotten.

"It came two days ago," replied her grandmother. "It's from them lawyers of—of your father's."

But Katherine was already tearing it open. Out of it fell a check—a check for an amount so fabulous, so incredible, that she turned pale.

In the envelope was also a brief communication to the effect that, hereafter, by order of our client, Richard M. Howard, Esq., Miss Howard would receive quarterly a remittance of the same size as this. That Mr. Howard wished to express the hope that it would be sufficient to enable her to live as and where she preferred.

Katherine flushed scarlet. . . . Still, if mere humiliation was the price of this wonderful scrap of paper, it had been cheaply bought; for it ordered the payment to Miss Katherine Howard of two thousand five hundred dollars. Twenty-five hundred dollars! And there were to be four of these a year, every year, forever! Ten thousand dollars a year—for one girl to live on! Ten thousand a year! Katherine's fingers, holding the check, trembled. It was too good to be true—yet it was true!

(3)

Of course she would return to the city: that was taken for granted. But what sort of establishment ought a young lady with ten thousand dollars a year to spend, to set up? It was Angela who, by letter,

playfully suggested building a sweet little bungalow—with one guest-room sacred to Angela!

The novel idea seized hold of Katherine's imagination. Tentatively she elaborated it, picturing a pretty gray "villa," of cement, with a pink-tiled roof and a pink-paved piazza, a charming conservatory over the porte-cochère, a darling breakfast-porch, a terraced lawn with walls overgrown with white honeysuckle and trumpet vines.—For the cozy-bungalow idea did not appeal to her at all. She was not that kind of a girl.

Soon it obsessed Katherine—the little gray villa. Women are the world's natural architects. Few of them but what feel strongly the house-building urge—the urge to design and to build, rather than to purchase ready-built or even ready-planned the home they are to live in. Katherine was no exception to the rule. At night, when she should have been sleeping so as to get up early the next morning and help her grandmother, she was lying awake, planning the color schemes of the rooms, their arrangement and special features. In the daytime, in her idle hours, she drew sets of "plans" with pencil in an old Lit. notebook.

How lucky that, in spite of a lack of family connections, she belonged in a definite set—thanks to Montescue clannishness! She would have a wonderful time! How the girls would envy her! Only a young girl herself, but the owner of a house, the employer of servants, the arbiter of her own destiny! It was incredibly romantic! Unhampered by the stupidi-

ties of parental restraint to which girls are usually subjected, she, Katherine, the super-girl, would follow, in everything, the dictates of her own sweet will, and no one's else! She would go about as she pleased. She would give wonderful parties. She would be invited to other people's parties. . . .

A sudden misgiving brought her up short.

Would she be invited to people's parties? Would people (the acid test) come to hers?

She knew the answer very well, try to ignore it, in her rosy vaporings, as she might. Montescue alumnæ might, for auld lang syne, include her in their parties—but they would not come to hers. They would want to—the bolder spirits; but socially shrewd mammas would never, never let them. Never let them become identified with a young girl who “lived alone.”

Her spirits, which had been soaring, dropped below zero. The super-girl felt cruelly defrauded by the same Fate which, a few moments before, she had been regarding as a delightful friend. Here she was—the possessor of wealth (yes, ten thousand a year really was wealth), style, popularity, and an immense capacity for enjoying pleasure—and yet, for lack of one trivial item, all these possessions were to be rendered null and void. And the one possession she lacked was the very commonest in the world! Other girls everywhere, from the richest to the poorest, had families; fathers, mothers, or at least married sisters or aunts or somebody—expressly provided for the sole purpose of giving them good times! She, Katherine, had no

one. No one, that is, except Grandma Hicks, who, so far as the good times of an heiress were concerned, was worse than no one.

Katherine glanced furtively across the room. It was evening, and Grandma Hicks was sitting by the kitchen table in the light of the kerosene lamp, neatly darning one of Katherine's silk stockings. She disapproved of silk stockings for every-day wear, both from the standpoint of modesty and of economy; but she disapproved still more sternly of Katherine's Epicurean habit of throwing them away as soon as a hole appeared.

No, Grandma Hicks was worse than no one. Still—from the outer shadow, Katherine regarded the old woman speculatively. Proper clothes work miracles. A soft, fine-wool dress of dark gray, now, with sheer collar and cuffs of white, and a velvet bow drooping from beneath a costly, old-fashioned brooch at the throat—a black satin gown with jet, a trifle quaint in cut, but immensely dignified—expensive but quiet hats—a fur coat reminiscent of the days when sealskin was really seal and not dyed rat—— . . .

Of course you could never hide Grandma Hicks's past. The records were graven too deep. No beauty-expert could soften the weather-beaten skin to rose-leaf, or erase the deep furrows with which pain and grief and over-hard toil had criss-crossed the old face. No alchemy of the manicure could make a fine lady's hand out of those swollen knuckles and roughened palms and broken nails on which the silk tissue of the stockings caught continually.

Still—one glance at Grandma Hicks revealed a quality which no one could miss: respectability.

And wasn't that, after all, the essential thing? Wasn't, after all, what Katherine needed, merely a figurehead of respectability for her unconventional establishment? She didn't need a mother's affection, a mother's care, parental guidance or restraint. All she needed was someone to offer to inquiring parents of the girls she wished to play with as a sort of voucher of respectability.

The girls might snicker at the old lady's lack of grammar and *savoir faire*; but their mothers would be satisfied. The latter would never know that Grandma Hicks left her spoon in her coffee-cup. They would only know that she was the most respectable, quaint, puritanical stern old dear that ever chaperoned a granddaughter; and that it was accordingly quite safe for their precious girls to visit Katherine—Richard M. Howard's heiress, by the way. (For even on Beacon Hill, where one affects to ignore it, money still talks persuasively.)

"Grandma," inquired Katherine, conversationally, "how should you like to go to Boston to live?"

Mrs. Hicks took another stitch or two. Then, without looking up, she replied grimly, "I begun my days in Millersville, and I guess I'll likely end 'em in Millersville."

This opening seeming unpropitious, Katherine did not press the point; for she wished to think the matter over and be sure that Grandma Hicks really was necessary to her before she brought it to an issue.

The next day she wrote to a Boston architect of whom she knew, enclosing sketches of her idea for the "villa" and requesting estimates from him.

Within the fortnight she received his reply. Now was visible the first rift in the lute. It appeared that Katherine had sketched a very expensive little villa. Everything about it, from the tiled roof to the many bathrooms and sunken tubs, seemed to be exactly the kind of thing that wears a high price-tag. Even the architect whom she had picked came high. It was very discouraging.

Could she compromise with her ideal—accept a cheaper sort of roof—tubs merely built-in—two fireplaces instead of six? Never! The little gray villa had enthralled Katherine, in its entirety, in its perfection, pink-tiled roof and all. She must possess it, and possess it in its entirety, in its perfection, in all its redundancy of baths and hearths.

She took pencil and note-book once more, and figured long and industriously; but in vain. By no sort of mathematical jugglery could she build the pink-and-gray villa out of her allowance, beautifully sufficient for anything as that allowance had seemed, till now.

Then a brilliant idea flashed up from her subconscious mind, like an inspiration of genius.

If Grandma Hicks went to Boston with her, what would Grandma Hicks need of a farm?

It was a good farm, a valuable piece of property. Katherine knew just what it could be expected to bring, for she had overheard Mrs. Hicks telling her

crony, Nancy Curtis, several evenings before, that the new book-farmer, Mr. Walton, who had bought old Sol Price's farm, adjoining hers, wanted to buy hers also. Katherine remembered the exact amount which, Mrs. Hicks had said, Mr. Walton had offered. Her heart beat fast. She wrote down the amount of Mr. Walton's offer, and, beside it, she wrote down the architect's estimate. She gazed excitedly at the two little rows of figures. The sale of the farm would build the villa!

To be sure, Grandma Hicks had not yet consented to go to Boston to live, though Katherine had somewhat developed the subject. There was beneath that unruffled reiteration: "I guess I'll end my days in Millersville," a strange vein of obstinacy. This, however, did not cause Katherine any anxiety. She was used to getting her own way, and she had no doubt that she would get it now—in due season. She hadn't yet played her trump card.

It was, however, about time to play it. The days were slipping by. Already it was the end of June. It takes time to build a little pink-and-gray villa which is to be perfection to the last detail. She was anxious to buy the lot (she had in mind just the location she wanted) and to have the ground broken. None of this could be done till Grandma Hicks's determination to end her days in Millersville was overcome, and the farm sold.

Accordingly Katherine opened fire on her grandmother that evening as they sat by the kitchen lamp. Many girls of the more crafty, circuitous instincts

supposed to be characteristic of the sex, would have been extra helpful all that day; perhaps, that evening, would have shown some solicitude about Grandma's eyesight and taken the stockings and darned them themselves.

Not so Katherine, whose nature was nothing if not straightforward, and scornful of subterfuge. She began her attack, therefore, with characteristic directness.

"Grandma, you know when I go to Boston to live, I'm going to take you with me."

In and out, in and out across the strands of darning-cotton that bridged a hole, this time in one of her own coarse, thick stockings, went Grandma's needle, as she replied, "I begun my days in Millersville, Kathy, and I guess I'll likely end 'em here."

Katherine checked on her lips an impatient, flippant query as to whether the climate at Millersville was more favorable to dying than elsewhere, and proceeded along her prearranged line of attack.

"But your life is so hard here, Grandma. It would be for your own self-interest. Now in Boston you wouldn't have a thing to do all day long but rest."

"I guess I wouldn't know what to do with myself without any work to keep me busy," replied Grandma, setting her lips rather straight. "I guess when I die it'll be in harness."

"I don't see why you talk about *dying* so much!" exclaimed Katherine, impatiently.

"Young folks talk about marrying; old folks talk about dying."

"Well, anyway, before you do die, Grandma, wouldn't you like to see something of the world?" wheedled Katherine.

"I guess Millersville's a fair sample," observed the old lady.

"Millersville!" Katherine's exasperation burst all bounds in the face of her grandmother's impregnable serenity. "*Millersville!*"

Obviously there was no use skirmishing. She must execute her grand coup.

"Well, then," she said with a shrug. "Of course if you won't come and live with me, I suppose I shall have to go by myself."

Her grandmother's hands trembled—or perhaps it was only the flickering of the lamplight in an eddy of night-breeze from the open window that made it seem so.

"Oh, well, I suppose I'm old enough to take care of myself," murmured Katherine, cheerfully. She rose from her chair and strolled about the room, humming a little tune.

Grandma dropped a stitch, and bent low over her work, picking it up.

"I think I'll start about the end of this week," remarked Katherine.

Now this was the time to have sauntered unconcernedly out of the kitchen; but Katherine could not resist the temptation to wait and see the result of her coup.

There was no doubt now that Grandma's hands were trembling. She dropped another stitch.

Just so had her own girl, her Belle Ansella, gone to the city—alone.

A small drop of wetness plashed on the stocking.

Katherine saw it, but made no sign. She leaned her elbows on the window-sill and peered out at the lovely night. Stirrings, sleepy twitterings, came up out of the dark to her; the raspings of insect's wings, the soft rustle of grasses. Fireflies flashed their eerie lanterns, circling, mounting, swooping, leaving little fiery trails for an instant in the dark.

For an instant, Katherine felt the beauty and romance and mystery of night in the country pressing in on her: then her thoughts returned to her own desires, and the night was shut out.

Mrs. Hicks had laid down her mending. Stealthily, puritanically ashamed of emotion, she wiped her old eyes. Then she spoke, and her voice was harsh.

"Come here, Kathy."

Katherine, allowing her own lips to set, just for an instant, so that, for that instant, she looked a little like her grandmother, drew a rocker into the circle of the lamplight.

"Kathy," said her grandmother, sternly. Then her voice softened. She was conscious that hardness had always alienated, would always alienate, this head-strong granddaughter. She made an almost pathetic effort to win her this time, instead of to alienate. "Kathy," she said brokenly, "'tain't easy for you and me to talk. Seems like we always set each other to loggerheads. You've been brought up different from my day. Things I set store by don't seem to you like

they were worth much; and I suppose the things you set store by don't seem much to me. But there's some things, Kathy, that were worth a lot in the days of Noah; and that will be worth just as much the day the Angel Gabriel blows his last trump."

Katherine suppressed an amused smile. Noah! The Angel Gabriel!

Mrs. Hicks did not perceive the smile. She went on, still with that pathetic effort at conciliation: "One o' them is a woman's purity."

Katherine fidgeted. To the young, discussion of these matters by the old is unseemly and painfully embarrassing.

Unheeding, Mrs. Hicks went on: "The city ain't any place for a young girl alone. I know I'm only an ugly old woman and ignorant so fur as book-learning goes; but I've lived a long time, and I've seen a lot o' things happen. . . .

"There was Celie Trueblood went down to Boston, years and years ago. . . . And never seen or heard of since. . . . And there was Rosie Curtis, old Nancy's niece, went down to Boston, years and years ago; and one day they got a notice from the government down there to come and see if 'twas Rosie dead in the morgue, with a cried-up letter from Nancy in her dress-front. And it was. . . . And then there was—just a young girl—just your age, Kathy—eyes like yours—headstrong, just like you ——"

Mrs. Hicks cleared her throat.

"Oh, but Grandma," interrupted Katherine, impatient of the emotional appeal, and embarrassed by it,

"don't you see how different it all is? They had no money, and that was the cause. I am not going down to the city to make a living! I shall have ten thousand dollars a year, Grandma! Ten thousand a year! Don't you see how different that makes it all?"

"Sand ——" muttered Mrs. Hicks, shaking her head. "A house built on the sand. An allowance don't seem to me, Kathy, a very solid foundation to build on. Supposing ——"

Katherine smiled, a superior smile. "That's just because you haven't had any experience with one, Grandma," she explained, interrupting again. "An allowance is just as solid as any other form of income. You don't understand it, that's all."

"Supposing your—father should die, Kathy?" suggested her grandmother.

"If there were a will, he would undoubtedly provide for me in it," said Katherine. "If there were no will—I haven't looked up the law on the subject"—Katherine admitted largely, "but I have no doubt but what, in such an event, I should be"—in spite of herself, her voice quivered as she spoke the awe-inspiring words, "his heir."

"And supposing he has already made a will," suggested Mrs. Hicks, bluntly. "Years ago—before he got interested in you—an' forgot to change it, Kathy; then what?"

Katherine sniffed impatiently. "Oh—well ——" she replied, rather vaguely.

There was a short pause.

Mrs. Hicks cleared her throat again.

"I've come to figure out, Kathy," she resumed, "that the city ain't any place for a young girl alone."

"Yet," cried Katherine, quick to follow up this advantage, "you're going to let me go alone!"

Mrs. Hicks looked, rather perplexed, at her granddaughter.

"Kathy," she said, "why're you so set on going to Boston?"

"Why?" echoed Katherine, somewhat at a loss, for the question was one whose answer, like a geometric axiom, was so simple that it ought to be seen by anyone, and yet was not easily demonstrable. "Why, for—every reason. Anybody would rather live in Boston than in Millersville, of course!"

"I know one that wouldn't," retorted Mrs. Hicks, grimly. The moment for reconciliation was past.

(4)

Mrs. Hicks had a wise, age-old theory. What Katherine needed was a husband and a whole brood of children. Children were what tamed a girl; made her settle down. And perhaps down there in Boston, among her rich friends, was the young man whom Katherine was to marry. This, perhaps, was God's plan for Kathy. The stern old woman was softened in the presence of this thought.

So when Katherine, rising, issued her stormy ultimatum: "So I'm going! And since you want me to go alone, I'll go alone!" Victory had already perched on her standard, though neither she nor her grandmother was, as yet, aware of the fact. It was not till

the next evening that Mrs. Hicks, who had spent some hours on her knees in pious, earnest entreaty at the Heavenly Footstool, and who felt at last that God's will and her duty had been revealed to her, announced to Katherine that she would go with her to the city, if Katherine must go.

"Oh, Grandma! I'm so glad!" trilled Katherine, joyously. "Three cheers! Don't look so lugubrious, old dear! You're going to have the time of your life! You will love it!"

Of course, actually, the more important part of the plan—the selling of the farm and conversion of the proceeds into a villa—was yet to be accomplished; but Katherine had little anxiety about that. Where there's a will there's a way. The super-girl had a very strong will, and she was used to having her way. She had had it in this matter so far; she expected to keep on having it.

She let the matter rest for the time being, but the following afternoon, after the dishes were done, and Mrs. Hicks had sat down with some dish-towels to hem, Katherine broached the subject with a fine casualness:

"By the way, Grandma, when we go to Boston, what shall you do with the farm?"

Mrs. Hicks's reply was grim: "I sh'll have to rent, I suppose."

"Why not sell outright?" suggested Katherine, cheerfully. "I know you have a good offer."

Mrs. Hicks raised her head. She stared, absolutely speechless, at her incredible granddaughter.

"You know I was thinking," continued Katherine, conversationally, "how much nicer it would be for us both if, instead of an apartment, we should take a little house. Of course I could rent, easily enough. But, on the other hand, we could satisfy ourselves so much better by buying one.

"Or better yet," she added brightly, after a moment's silence, "by building!"

Her grandmother's attentive gaze encouraged her. She described with mounting confidence, the pink-and-gray villa. She got out the architect's tentative blue-prints; thus unconsciously revealing the fact that for some time past she had been going ahead as if her grandmother's consent had already been won.

"Of course all this will cost money," the diplomatic girl concluded, amiably. "But I was thinking—suppose you should sell the farm, then we could build the villa."

She leaned back complacently in her chair, as if awaiting what could only be a favorable, a delighted answer.

Mrs. Hicks looked at her strangely.

"And when I have sold my property and given the money to you——"

Katherine interrupted with a quick gesture. "Of course the villa will belong to you——"

"The viller, as you call it, ain't going to earn me anything," said Mrs. Hicks, grimly. "When I have got rid of my farm and put the money into your viller, what shall I live on?"

"Why, Grandma!" protested Katherine. "Of course you'll be living with me!"

"On what?" demanded Mrs. Hicks, still with that strange look.

"On my allowance, of course!" laughed Katherine. "Isn't ten thousand enough——"

She stopped abruptly.

Mrs. Hicks had risen suddenly. Her back had straightened. She was as white as paper and her eyes blazed.

"No!" she cried. "No! Live on blood-money? Eat my bread from the hands that murdered my girl? No. Not that."

Her voice failed her suddenly. Her brown face showed grayish as the blood receded. She swayed.

Katherine sprang up and caught her by the arm.

"What's the matter, Grandma?" she cried sharply.

The old lady opened her eyes, which had closed, and smiled.

"Nothing," she said. "Go away, Kathy, for a little while. I'll set a spell and rest."

Katherine, from the threshold of her room, listened in terror to the silence of the kitchen. Suppose her grandmother had died? People—old people, particularly—sometimes die of shock! Suppose she had killed her grandmother?

The creak of a rocker, by and by, reassured her. She stole along the little dark hallway, to a position from which, in a mirror over the sink, she could see her grandmother, swinging calmly to and fro in her favorite rocker, hemming dish-towels, and smiling.

The sight of Mrs. Hicks, so normal, so tranquil, so undisturbed while Katherine had been working herself up to a pitch of remorseful anxiety which she now saw to have been ridiculous, kindled a sudden rage in the girl.

She walked swiftly back to her room. She dragged an armful of clothes from the hook in the old-fashioned "wardrobe" and thrust them into one of her trunks, which still, by her wish, stood in her room. Armful by armful, she emptied wardrobe and bureau drawers, and crushed their contents into the trunks, regardless of the havoc she was making.

Then she flung on a hat, took a camel's-hair coat over one arm, and her alligator-skin bag in one hand, and walked swiftly out into the kitchen, her heart still hot with the revulsion of rage, disappointment and chagrin.

"Good-bye, Grandma," she said, coldly. "I'm off. My trunks will be called for."

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Hicks sharply.

"That I should say," retorted Katherine, with deliberate cruelty, "is solely my own concern."

She turned and walked out. Mrs. Hicks sat motionless in her favorite rocker.

Katherine walked swiftly down the front path. She opened the front gate and passed out into the dust of the road. She walked swiftly toward the station, without a backward look.

Suddenly she heard a queer, choked cry.

"Kathy!"

She turned sharply.

It was her grandmother, bareheaded, her old arms stretched out, running, stumbling down the road after her.

"Kathy!" she choked. "Don't go away—alone! I'll —— Oh, my God, I'll sell ——"

She plunged forward, in a heap.

Katherine tried to lift her; tried to drag her back to the house.

The burden was beyond her strength. She placed her own hat to shield her grandmother's head; then she ran wildly down the road toward Nancy Curtis's.

Mr. Walton, the book-farmer, driving home from Dover, jumped his speedometer from eighteen miles to forty-five as he saw the dark heap in the road afar off, and the flying figure running toward him and signaling.

He carried the old woman, still unconscious, into the "spare room" and laid her on the great bed. Katherine applied what little first aid she knew of, while the book-farmer telephoned to Dover for a doctor.

Nancy Curtis came, too; and the best doctor in Dover: but it was all of no use. Grandma Hicks's time had come.

(5)

Toward midnight, Katherine was alone with her. The lamp, its flame turned low, sent flickering shadows across the bed, with its long mound of counterpane.

Suddenly, with a start, Katherine, who had been brooding sombrely, realized that the whiteness of the expanse was interrupted. Her grandmother's eyes,

which had been shut, were open. They produced a startling effect.

"Wh-what is it, Grandma?" stammered the girl, terrified.

Mrs. Hicks seemed to come back from somewhere far away.

"Kathy, I—was right, you see. I'm going—to end—here."

"Oh, Grandma, Grandma, don't!" begged Katherine, in a stifled scream, hysterical with remorse. The super-girl was cowed. She sensed a Stronger than herself in the room.

"Hush!" Mrs. Hicks spoke with increasing difficulty. It was an agony to watch her struggle with the numbness that would have closed her lips and hushed her voice.

"The farm—yours now—don't sell —— Rent."

Katherine thought it was over.

But the old lips quivered, opened again. A whisper emerged. Katherine bent to catch it:

"Allowance—house—on sand. . . . Rent. . . .
Then—income—always . . . even . . .
if . . ."

The old voice trailed into silence.

Katherine sat, paralyzed by the sight of that awful paralysis.

The face in the pillow quivered. The eyelids lifted with an effort, as though they were unutterably heavy. The eyes fixed on Katherine with uncanny significance. But the lips, if there was a message from the edge of death, were dumb.

It had come! The struggle of the flesh to retain the spirit.

Katherine shrieked. Nancy Curtis, who had been snatching a nap on the couch in the kitchen, came running; but it was all over before she got there. The flesh, after all, had held the spirit but lightly. The serenity of eternal peace had already smoothed the old face in which life had worn so many trails of care and grief. Grandma Hicks's days were ended—in Millersville.

Katherine, the brand of Cain on her brow, sat white and shuddering. Trying to pray. Trying to pray the brand of Cain away. Trying to pour her remorse into the deaf ears of the tenantless body.

And all the time, deep down, she knew that this storm of her soul was transitory. Beneath the surges and the shrieking winds, lay, submerged but unaltered, the rock of her Will.

CHAPTER IV

BORED

(I)

BORED to death. Just bored to death. Too bored even to yawn.

Katherine sat on the edge of a gray wicker chaise longue and thought about it. She was bored of her life, bored of her house (the exquisite gray villa she had had such pleasure in building), bored of her friends, bored of herself—of herself especially.

It was two years since her grandmother's death, her selling of the farm to the neighboring book-farmer, and her shaking of the dust of Millersville from her exquisitely shod feet. Two years! She sighed.

She glanced at her jeweled bracelet-watch, which lay at hand on a graceful gray tabouret, along with the latest copy of *The Fast Set*, a candy-box full of empty crinkly pink-paper cups, a bowl of daffodils (which was evidently the tabouret's intended decoration), a monogrammed ivory nail-buffer, a little pile of snapshots just up from the photographer's, a small ash-tray heaped with cigarette-stubs, a platinum cigarette case, open and half empty, and some other small unrecognizable litter.

Eleven-thirty. One hour since breakfast. Two hours till luncheon. She must do something. What?

She must do something, and there was nothing to

do. Nothing, that is to say, which intrigued her fancy. Of course literally there was anything and everything. Everything or anything she pleased. Nothing is beyond the reach of ten thousand a year.

For instance, she could go to the manicurist's. Her nails needed a thorough going over.

Or she could call up the shampoo-place for someone to come and wash her hair and give her a facial massage.

Or she could go down-town shopping. There was nothing she needed, but anything she should have sent out could be sent back next day after she tired of looking at it.

Or she could call up Angela and arrange to meet her for luncheon. Then they could go to something—a movie or something—in the afternoon. That is (her gloomy gaze shifted for an instant to the empty candy-box) if Angela had not made herself sick on chocolates last night. Angela, whose allowance from her father was penuriously small, was always making herself sick on Katherine's chocolates.

Or (her gaze reverted to a long mirror opposite the chaise longue) she could take the car out for a drive.

Or she could start on a trip—to New York or Los Angeles or London or Archangel or anywhere else she chose; most of the world was still unseen. But gorges and primeval forests, factories, public buildings and villages, museums and ruins, did not fire her imagination. The very thought of them depressed and wearied her.

In short, though the super-girl could do practically

anything in the world she wished, she was as badly off as if she had been unable to do anything—since there was nothing she wished to do.

She yawned at last, and reached—again—for the cigarette-case.

The mirror opposite her held a picture worthy of philosophic consideration: a section of two gray walls and a casement window; on one wall, in a narrow black frame, a Japanese print fit to inspire dreams; on the other, a little Russian icon, packed with human story; a bit of costly gray Chinese rug on the polished floor; the long French chair and a tasseled cushion from the Arts and Crafts—black with sprays of wistaria; the graceful turkish tabouret littered with trifles from the jeweler, the confectioner, the photographer and the story factory. The world had been rifled to make a setting for the American super-girl who, half-wrapped in a burnoose of Broussa silk and with beaded Paris mules on her feet, held the centre of the picture. Figuratively speaking, Aladdin's lamp sat on the tabouret, and the Magic Carpet lay under the chaise longue.

Yet a frown—not to say scowl—knit the black brows of the portrayed girl in the mirror; her fine shoulders sagged; the cigarette dangled from her languid fingers; her whole vigorous, athletic figure was slumped ungracefully. "They are as sick that surfeit with too much, as they that starve with nothing." Sicker, perhaps. In short, had the mirror been a canvas, it might very appropriately have been listed in the Spring Catalogue as "L'Ennui."

A little knock on the door interrupted the picture.

"Come!" said Katherine, leaning on the cushions.

A small, attenuated gentlewoman in black with a quick little tread and a mousey look, entered and slipped across the room to the closet, murmuring explanatorily: "I noticed the coral gown needs a snap."

Katherine sighed. As the mousey woman slipped noiselessly from the room, the girl spoke: "Disconnect the 'phone, will you, Mrs. Jordane? And if anyone calls, tell them I'm sick—out—dead—anything."

"Very well, Miss Katherine," replied the mousey one, who was Katherine's efficient housekeeper and official chaperone. She shot an intelligent glance at the girl, and, going out, closed the door soundlessly behind her.

Katherine wriggled petulantly in the delicate embrace of the chaise longue. Her querulous questing gaze fell on *The Fast Set*. To read was to follow the line of least resistance; but she could not endure the silly, spurious eroticisms of this particular magazine. They bored her intolerably. She only harbored the publication because Angela adored it, and her mother would not allow it in the house.

Still ——

Katherine reached a listless hand for it, picked it up, flipped the leaves. A letter fell out from between them. She replaced it; tossed the magazine down again.

If she were only strong-minded like Bess Freelyn,

and could take an interest in suffrage, and women's clubs, and Consumer's Leagues and things!

Or if only she were sentimental like Angela, and could humbug herself by playing at little charities and "uplift" movements!

Or if only she were good-naturedly malicious like Bettina, and could get never-failing interest out of gently pushing human pawns about on her little world's private chess-board, and watching with animation the progress of her game with Fate!

Or if she were even downright devilish like Marie. . . .

She picked up *The Fast Set* again, flipped the pages again. The letter again fell out.

She stared at its envelope gloomily. It was Angela's latest letter from her brother Paul, who lived in Italy. He had the secret—this Paul. He knew how to keep from being bored. His letter—like all her correspondence, Angela had read it to her,—his letter had tingled, had thrilled with a fulness of life, a joy of life, a thirst and a deep-drinking of life. What was the secret—that some people had, and she missed?

She drew the letter from its sheath. She read it again.

The letter had lost much in Angela's tinkling rendition. Angela, who had a sort of scared admiration of her prodigal brother, leavened with a sort of shrewd human appraisal of him at his true worth, was not quite equal to reproducing the heights and depths and fulness of his paragraphs.

Now that she read it herself, the letter stirred Kath-

erine queerly. It was not that she was in love with Angela's brother, whom, indeed, she had never seen, since he had not been home on a visit in four years. He was devoted to his studies, which had been, at one time, painting; at another, sculpture; vocal culture, now. As Angela was wont sagely to remark: "Paolo has to keep studying something; else Papa would stop his allowance and he would have to come home. He is thirty and has never earned a cent yet."

No, Katherine was not in love even with the idea of Paolo. She was not, and never had been, in love with anybody. She had never had a "lover," as Angela and the other girls of the set ingenuously called what our grandmothers called "beaux." Katherine had never had a beau—for Baldie Daggett was not, properly speaking, a beau, though he and Katherine were always paired off together by the set. No, Baldie was not a beau. He had never held her hand; he had never kissed her. Indeed she had never been kissed by anybody.

As she felt the thick, smooth paper of Paolo's letter between her fingers, a passion of discontent swelled up so big in her that it seemed as if only the gusty expulsion of her breath kept her from bursting apart into a million atoms. For Paolo, obviously, was not discontented. Paolo licked his lips for life. He rolled life under his tongue. Even the feel of his stationery declared it.

"Ah, Angellina," the words on the flat of the page, in their beautiful bold black characters, sprang out: "You ask me when I shall return! Never! You do

not understand, my little sister! . . . Let me see if I can explain. . . . There is a garden that I know of, high, high on the side of Posillipo. The little round tables of the *restaurant all'aria aperta* on its secluded terrace are almost always deserted. There are dark trees heavy with sweetness, and a low wall about its edge, beneath which lies all Napoli.

“At noon the voice of the city comes up to it faintly—the shouts of donkey-boys and carriage-drivers, the cracking of whips, the droning of priests, the cries of the venders of *spinaci* and *piselli*, the chantings of naked fishermen, the quarrelings of lovers, the high singings of young girls carrying water from the fountains—all incessant, all at top voice—the voice of Napoli.

“But at dusk—ah, Angellina! Then all is shadowed. All is drenched in mystery. Then all the shoutings and cryings out and shriekings are hushed; and only the songs remain—only the songs of lovers; rising from the streets and the byways, from the balconies and the cafés, from little boats on the purpling sea and from the lighted quai where Santa Lucia gleams jewel-like, and from the vineyards beyond which, shadowed faintly in the twilight sky, Vesuvius lies sleeping. All is mystery. A woman's eyes, held in one's own, are mystery: her hair is mystery: love is mystery: life is mystery.

“Have you any such noons—such twilights—in your *Bahston*? No, in America all is ugly—even the names of the cities! Buildings are hideous, women are suffragettes, your streets have no vistas, love has

no subtlety, life is a vulgar rush, even sin is tawdry and without charm. Return? Never! *Io sono Italiano!* I am an Italian! She is my beloved: Italia! Women are meteors: she, Italy, is my planet of love. . . .

“You ask me of ‘Beatrice.’ Ah, ‘Bice’! *Una tigre! Feroce!* Sometime she will stick me with a small dagger; and then all will be over. But how she enraptures me! Tell me, Angellina, dost think the *padre* — Yet I know the answer without asking. The father would never consent; and of course without his consent — Alas! . . . For after marriage one must still eat. . . .”

Katherine skipped the rest of the letter, which was concerned with the more prosaic side of Paolo's life. Dreamily, with black brows knit, she pondered over what she had read, striving to take it in.

She could not take it in. She could not assay it. Yet, somehow, it stirred her. There was something lawless about it—nothing one could put a finger on—yet it called to the mutinous heart of her. It stirred her to revolt.

Life had been too flat—too colorless! She had a right to something more—or different—than it had given her!

There is a Turkish proverb which says: “*The Devil may tempt the busy man; but the idle man tempts the Devil.*”

(2)

Babette, Katherine's perfect up-stairs maid, brought

in a card on which was nicely engraved in square letters, "Mr. Archibald Daggett."

"Bother!" said Katherine. She looked down at the thick, creamy surface of Paolo's epistle. Baldie was decidedly a prosy and non-stimulating young man.

"What does he want, Babette?" she asked.

Babette replied, with her perfect manner, which never gave the slightest hint of a human being with human desires, individual preferences, normal curiosities about her employers, and a life apart: "I don't know, Miss Howard. Mr. Daggett didn't say."

Katherine sighed deeply. The days had been when she had hailed Baldie's every arrival as the advent of a chosen "pal," a boon companion. She had smoked with Baldie, swum with Baldie, ridden with Baldie, canoed with Baldie, motored with Baldie, gossiped with Baldie, quarreled with Baldie and made it up. But those days were days of a dead past—before she became chronically bored. Baldie had been a good pal, but his day was done; for he could not lift her out of her boredom.

The pathetic thing was that Baldie did not seem to realize that his day was done. He seemed to take it for granted, in the most obtuse way, that he and Katherine were just as good pals as ever, and always would be. It would really have been touching—if it had not been so irritating. Katherine sighed again—volcanically.

"Well—tell him if he wants to wait I'll be down in a half hour. Then come back and help me dress."

"Yes, ma'am," said Babette.

Left alone, after the respectful click of the latch behind Babette, Katherine once more scowled in the mirror.

Everybody was so silly about Baldie. Angela, in particular. Only last night, Angela had taken Katherine severely to task about him. Angela had said that Katherine ought to make up her mind whether or not she wanted to marry Baldie; and if she wanted to, then she ought to bring him to the point and become engaged to him; and if she didn't want to marry him, she ought to turn him loose.

"It's an injustice to you and to him," Angela had declared strenuously. "It's an injustice to him, because anybody can see that he is dead in love with you, only he doesn't know how to break through into love-making. If you want him, you ought to show him how, and have it over with. If you don't want him, it's an injustice to yourself to allow him to monopolize you so. You'll never get a chance at anybody else so long as the fellows all think Baldie has his tag on you. It's men's curious idea of honor—they never think of *our* side of it! A man like Baldie is to a girl like a scarecrow in a field of corn! Nobody else will ever come around so long as he is there. If you don't want him, you'd better give him the air."

"Oh, la, la!" Katherine had retorted.

"Beside," Angela had added, then, "people are really beginning to talk."

"I don't care what people say!" the super-girl had retorted scornfully. But she did. Everybody does.

All this was in her mind now as she waited for Babette to return and dress her.

It was reflected in the frown with which, forty minutes later, she greeted Baldie.

Baldie was never more obviously and pathetically unaware that his day was done, than when she entered her beautiful blue and old ivory reception-room. His insensitiveness to the chill fact was patent all the way from the cheerful upstanding bristle of his short-cropped sandy hair down to the cheerful red gloss of his blunt-toed cordovans. It was obvious in the cheerful loud check of his suit and the amazing futuristic color-revel of his four-dollar scarf. It was obvious in the cheerful way in which he was drumming on the great orange jar which struck the harmonic note in the midst of the blue and ivory melody. It was obvious in his blithe, "Hello! Only forty minutes! Some little speedster, aren't you, Kat?"

Katherine vouchsafed a grumpy monosyllable in response.

"What's the matter?" asked Baldie, frankly.

"Oh—nothing. Just bored—as usual."

Baldie looked at her commiseratingly and wagged his head.

"Must be an awful affliction," he murmured, irritatingly.

Baldie was never bored. Whatever he was doing was invariably the most absorbing and interesting occupation in the world, whether it was getting up a minstrel show, going out to practice with a scrub team, leading a cheering-section at the Big Game, making

fudge in a girl's chafing-dish or speeding over the hills at fifty miles an hour. He had achieved the difficult feat of being an almost permanent Harvard student. It was like walking a tight-rope across a dizzy gorge. To flunk out would tumble him to the left hand; to pass successfully on to his degree would tumble him to the right; but the abyss was all one. Flunking or graduating meant one and the same fate; he would have to "go to work." But he had walked the tight-rope now successfully for four years and he saw no reason why he should not walk it for four years more. He was at present the oldest living Sophomore; and with care and good luck he hoped to put off the day of his (to change the metaphor) delivery into the hands of the Egyptians until his twenty-sixth year at least. What was the use of having a father who was a several-times-over millionaire if one had to sweat blood to earn a living like anyone else? But unfortunately Baldie's father was of a different opinion, and was only awaiting the finish of his son's "education" before putting him into the shoe-factory from which the Daggett millions had emanated.

Work was a long way off, however, and Baldie believed in not crossing the bridge till he came to it. This morning he was fairly bubbling with high spirits.

"Well, what's the matter with your 'phone?" he asked jocundly, in reply to Katherine's explanation about her malady. "Is it bored, too? I been trying to get you ever since eleven o'clock."

"I told them to leave the receiver off the hook,"

said Katherine, coldly, "I was tired of hearing it ring."

"Fine idea!" commented Baldie, ironically. "Well, anyway, I cut psych. and ran over to tell you there's a skating-party on for to-night out at the Country Club rink—Braeburn—and a big crowd going. Banish dull care, my child, and prepare to enjoy life once more!"

"Much I feel like a skating-carnival!" retorted Katherine, disdainfully.

"Well, you'll feel less like staying at home," prophesied Baldie, sagaciously. He knew his Katherine pretty well, after four years. "I'll be round with the little buzz-wagon about seven. Wanta get out there before the ice gets all cut up."

"Well, I won't promise," said Katherine, discouragingly.

"Oh, you needn't promise!" retorted Baldie, with a friendly wink. "Well, ta-ta for now. Gotta beat it. This is my last cut this semester. See you to-night."

"Maybe."

"Dress warm!" And Baldie treated her to a confident grin, and, with a wave of the hand, bolted informally out of the blue-and-ivory reception-room and out of the villa. Through a window, Katherine watched him negotiate her elegant little walled terraces at a run, vault into the robin's-egg blue roadster which had superseded the vermilion one, throw in the clutch, and jump forward toward his academic responsibilities.

"He's very sure of me!" muttered Katherine,

cynically, to herself. Nevertheless, meeting Mrs. Jordane in the hall, she announced, "We'll have dinner early to-night—six o'clock. I'm going out at seven."

"Very well, Miss Katherine," said Mrs. Jordane.

CHAPTER V

A PHILOSOPHER'S SMILE

(1)

ON Ash-Wednesday, Katherine gave Mrs. Jordane a vacation-with-pay, and migrated, bag and baggage, to Angela's home in Back Bay, where she had agreed to spend the Lenten season. She was welcoming the change. She was growing dreadfully tired of living in the pink-and-gray villa and dispensing the pink-and-gray villa's aimless hospitality. It would be a relief to subside quietly into the bosom of a family for a while. Angela's parents were very devout, though somewhat divided between Epicopalianism (high church) and Christian Science. They observed all the Lenten renunciations with uncompromising conventionality. Katherine's stay under their roof would perforce be a forty days' withdrawal from cigarettes, flirtation, and all other pleasant vanities of the world, but the idea appealed to her. For she was bored, worse bored every day, with everything that filled her life.

Angela herself opened the front door for her guest as the latter alighted from her taxicab and directed the disposal of her steamer-trunk.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're going to be here forty whole days, Kitty!" her friend cried, squeezing her arm

affectionately as they walked up-stairs side by side. "And, oh, Kitty, what do you think? Paul is here!"

"Paul!" Katherine felt, for some unaccountable reason, a little interruption of her heart-beat: as if—preposterous idea!—the news contained some personal significance for her.

"Not the ghost of a notion but what he was on the other side of the water!—Take off your coat and hat, Kitty ——"

In the library, Mrs. Grayson, a small pale woman—"a pocket-edition of Angela," Baldie called her—greeted Katherine with a habitual air of absent-mindedness.

"And Katherine," she said, "let me introduce my son, Paul."

Katherine found herself extending her hand to a rather small well-fed-looking young man.

"To my enchantment!" murmured the young man, with an un-American accent, taking the hand, and bowing over it, with an air that suggested he was on the point of actually kissing it. That was the thought that flashed through Katherine's head, and, to her horror, the super-girl found herself snatching away her hand (which had never been kissed, either in public or private) and crimsoning to the roots of her hair.

Angela made it worse. She laughed and said, "Paolo, you have made Katherine blush!"

The young man looked amused. He was very dramatic. "I am too much the Italian!" he murmured, half-insolently, half-apologetically. "You

must forgive me, my dear Miss Howard. I forget that your American men ——”

“American men are the kind we raise in America,” interposed a somewhat truculent voice, as Baldie, whom Katherine had not even seen when she entered the room, stepped up. “We leave dagos to Italy. Hello, Kat!”

Katherine was furious at the insignificant little Paul for making her ridiculous; at the same time, far from being grateful to Baldie for her rescue, she was ashamed of him and of it. She saw him, for the first time, through eyes such as this Paolo’s, and perceived all his uncouthness, his lack of polish and *finesse*.

Paolo did not look like an American. His olive skin, his bold, black eyes, his amorous mouth with the little black moustache on the upper lip, his slim hands, his sleek black hair, made him a surprising alien in the bosom of his ultra-American family. He had not, too, at thirty, the sober, settled, and yet boyish look which most American young men have. He had something volatile, something of the eternal faun, which made him look as though he would never outgrow his adolescence; and, at the same time, he had a very wise look, and bore an insolent manner, as though he had never had a boyhood.

“Well, Paul, my son ——” Mr. Grayson, senior, entered the room. He was a portly, high-colored gentleman, big-voiced, prosperous-looking, pompous, and aggressively respectable. “Rather a surprise you’ve given us, eh?”

He did not speak as if it were a particularly pleasant surprise.

Paul looked smaller and more volatile than ever, beside the large, solid, virtuous bulk of his father; and yet one seemed to see, after all, how the latter might have begotten such a son.

“Oh, a surprise, yes!”

Katherine, talking languidly with Baldie, heard every syllable of the lazy, impudent voice replying that the climate of Italy had become enervating ——

Mr. Grayson burst into a short, grim laugh. “In other words, you’ve spent your allowance and had to beat it home!”

Paul shrugged his shoulders, and began speaking in Italian, which Mr. Grayson apparently understood.

When the young man spoke English with his languorous accent, he sounded affected; but, curiously enough, when he began speaking Italian, he became natural. The mellow tone of his voice, the liquid syllables, the quick accompanying gestures of his slim pale hands, the animation of his whole body, recreated him. Katherine saw suddenly his charm for Beatrice. She saw, too, the source of his insolence. He was confident of attracting women without effort—even against a sporting handicap of deliberate effrontery. Experience had been kind to him.

Well—he should see that there was one young woman for whom he had no charm. Katherine devoted herself, during dinner and throughout the evening, conspicuously to Baldie.

Paolo seemed to be impressed by the fact that Kath-

erine was a disdainful young woman (not sufficiently good-looking to afford to be disdainful, either) and Baldie Daggett's exclusive property. Paolo had no use for other men's property. He cast a few indifferent glances over the young woman who was satisfied to be the property of an uncouth fellow like Daggett, and, serenely, he left Baldie in possession.

At least, this was the impression that Katherine got.

She was aware that she disliked Paolo inordinately, and that she had never seen a man who seemed to her so insignificant, or so provokingly unaware of his insignificance.

She resolved to make him aware of it.

(2)

"Why am I so repulsive to you?" asked Paolo, sotto voce, as he encountered Katherine on the staircase, one afternoon a fortnight or so later.

"You're not repulsive to me," replied Katherine, frowning as she twitched the gossamer fabric of her sleeve from his light grasp. "Please don't flatter yourself!"

"Why then, do you always run away when I come near you?" he urged.

"How absurd! I'm sure I don't!" retorted Katherine, though she knew she did. Her two weeks under the same roof with this objectionable young man had been one perpetual flight from him. It was the way she was showing him his insignificance.

"You're never alone with me for an instant——" began Paolo, rolling his eyes up at her—though she

could not really be sure that secretly he was not laughing at her.

"I'm sorry," she interrupted, brusquely. "I'm afraid I really can't stop to discuss it now. Baldie Daggett is waiting for me down-stairs."

"That cub!" ejaculated Paolo, with annoyance. "That overgrown bread-and-butter baby!"

"Bread and butter's not such a bad diet in comparison with"—she dropped him a slightly mocking glance—"caviare!"

Paolo suppressed a flattered smile. He liked being compared to caviare. "A good diet—bread and butter," he assented, gravely. "But—just a trifle monotonous?"

Katherine, in her turn, suppressed a smile. Baldie had been, of late, very monotonous. "Oh," she parried, "what isn't monotonous?"

A kindly smile now played openly across Paolo's features. He perceived so well Katherine's malady, and her own indignant ignorance of it. Indulgently, he knew its cause, and (though he was so young) its cure.

"Ah, Katherine, Katherine!" he said. He stepped up onto the step beside her. His look, searching her kindly, brought the blood to her cheeks. Now was the time to escape from him: instinct warned her. Yet she could not help but linger a moment. Though there was something about this young man which made her feel insecure, she was perfectly safe, there on the open staircase, with Angela and Harold Fifield (Angela's latest sentimental acquisition, a theological student, up

from Hartford for the week-end) in the music-room above, and Baldie in the drawing-room below. Besides, she could get away at any moment just as well as now. In all their encounters, Paolo had always, serenely, allowed her to escape. He had never tried to detain her. . . . That, indeed, was part of the trouble. Flight, always successful because there is no pursuit, finally becomes not only tame, but rather ridiculous. And Katherine felt a growing curiosity to know what would happen if she should not flee. Just what would this insignificant little Don Juan *do*? . . . In fact, it has to be confessed that in Katherine's consciousness, as she stood on the step, scorn- ing to shrink from Paolo, a praiseworthy state of apprehension found itself vieing with a somewhat reprehensible state of anticipation. She did not wish anything unseemly to happen, and yet — In short, Katherine was distinctly in the state of mind referred to in the Turkish proverb: She was idle, and she was tempting the devil. . . .

Nothing particularly unseemly happened. Paolo reached across in front of Katherine, and laid a hand, gently, respectfully, on her hand which lay on the balustrade. No harm in that. His arm did not touch her; his hand barely pressed hers, and with an almost fatherly kindness. The harm, apparently, was all in Katherine. For Katherine was acutely conscious of Paolo's arm, stretched across her, so near and yet not touching; and of Paolo's hand, so innocent and so disturbing. She would not for worlds have let him see that it disturbed her.

But he saw it.

"What is the matter, Katherine?" he asked gently. His eyes were bent steadily upon her. He seemed immensely old and wise and tolerant of the frailty of our human clay.

Katherine made no answer. She could not. She was petrified by some new, terrifying sensation which completely occupied her.

Paolo apparently recognized the moment. He began speaking to her in Italian. She heard without listening. It seemed as if her body listened and understood; the better that the foreign words were unintelligible to her.

And suddenly she forgot his hand on hers, and her eyes lifted and fastened on his face. He was again speaking in English, and he was saying strange things, incredible things to her.

"—The meaning of the terror and the thrill. No one has ever taught you. Katherine, has anyone?"

As he asked the impermissible question, there was something a little comical in the way Paolo's voice, so eager, sank as if it were ashamed of itself in spite of him; and in the way his would-be-bold eyes, in spite of him, dropped a little sheepishly under Katherine's steady, questioning gaze.

Something deep within her, a finer, more dignified Katherine than she had known existed, spoke unexpectedly.

"No," this Katherine replied drily. "And I do not care to learn." She pulled her hand abruptly from beneath his.

Paolo raised his eyes. The blood seemed to have ebbed from beneath his olive skin, leaving a curious pallor. "No," he said, in a low tone. "One sees that. You are beautifully—and wilfully—ignorant!" His curious pallor had become more pronounced. There was no shame in him now. Something had come upon him, swiftly and suddenly, which annihilated shame.

Yet he did not seek to detain her. When she made a motion to pass him without answer, he stood aside and let her pass.

She ran swiftly down-stairs. She hated Paolo wildly and extravagantly. Hated him for his power over her; and for his knowledge of it; and especially for his indifference to it.

Paolo, looking down on her from above, with the color flooding back under his olive skin, followed her with a slight, wise smile: He was old for his age, was Paolo. The conquering hero knew his conquest. Her hand quiescent under his; her being leaping to meet his at the hand. This was the true conquest.

He went to his room and took out a small, leather-bound diary which he had called, rather poetically, "A Philosopher's Smile," and which sometime he meant to have published. In it he now wrote:

"When a woman's hand has been to a man's hand as hers to mine, all is over. The rest—or whether there shall be any 'rest'—is a mere matter of circumstances. The inevitable struggle of the magnetic pair, their holding back from each other, are futile; pathetic; doomed to failure unless circumstances re-

inforce them. And when Dido and Æneas hunt together, the thunder-storm and the cave are seldom lacking. . . .”

He closed the book, and sat thinking; thinking and smiling. How well he knew them—Women! He saw this Katherine against a crowded, colorful, kaleidoscopic background. The background interpreted her. He smiled.

By and by he heard the honking of a horn in the street below. He went to his window and looked down. Katherine was just climbing into Baldie Daggett's robin's-egg roadster, beside Baldie. They were all in fur, both of them. Paolo smiled. How bored she would be!

Then his smile faded. “Confound it!” he muttered.

(3)

Katherine, though naturally she had not let Paolo know it, really was dreadfully bored at the prospect of an afternoon's tête-à-tête with Baldie. Caviare canapé, to develop Katherine's clever epigram beyond what she intended, really spoils a healthy appetite for plain bread and butter.

“Hello, Kat!” Baldie looked more bread-and-butterish than ever when she entered the drawing-room.

Paolo, it is true, was neither handsome nor of a godlike stature, but he conveyed an effect, often observable in women, but rarely in men, of being everything desirable. To possess it, one must have no salient features: an aggressive chin ruins it; a foot-

ball neck is fatal. Some healthy female natures prefer the rugged honest dominance that goes with the typical athletic American physique, just as the sturdy German prefers his beer to absinthe. Yet there are some natures to whom the subtler drink is irresistible.

Baldie was attired in a marvelous new outfit in the latest mode and culminating in a remarkable pair of pumpkin-colored boots. His hiked-up trousers-legs (both of which stuck in that position upon his sturdy calves when he rose to show his deference to Katherine, instead of descending gently of their own accord, as trousers-legs should do) displayed two inches of flesh-colored socks above his boot-tops—socks of a flesh-color so realistic as, at first glance, to startle and alarm.

“Baldie! What dreadful boots!” cried Katherine, by way of polite greeting. She didn’t mention the socks, but her scathing glance included them.

A vision of Paolo in his dark, unobtrusive attire, was vividly before her. It was impossible to imagine Paolo in pumpkin-colored boots and flesh-colored hose. The very idea of the latter made the super-girl blush, as if her imagination had done an impermissible thing.

“Yes, ain’t they?” agreed Baldie cheerfully.

“‘Ain’t’!” How crude he was; how clownish! “Baldie, why will you?” remonstrated Katherine, vexedly. If only Paolo were not able to despise Baldie, how much more useful to her the latter would be!

“I like ‘ain’t,’” protested Baldie. “It’s a nice, handy, democratic word.”

"Oh, of course, if you want people to think you're a common, ignorant fellow ——"

Baldie paled slightly under the grin. The forward thrust of a bulldog jaw marred the usual good-natured roundness of his countenance.

"Say, Kat," he said, "you haven't got much use for me lately, have you? Don't like much of anything about me, do you?"

Katherine took warning. After all, she did not want to quarrel with Baldie.

"I like lots of things about you, Baldie," she said gravely, "but I don't like your faults."

Baldie looked at her rather queerly. "Well, is my car one of 'em?" he inquired. "Because I brought it 'round. Thought maybe you'd like to go out for a little spin."

"Oh, fine! I'd love to!" cried Katherine, jumping up. Paolo had no car; and he could not blink the fact that this was a very decided asset of Baldie's.

"Bundle up now. It's cold as Sam Hill," warned Baldie.

He surveyed her critically when she came down in her fur coat and small toque.

"How about your ears? That little bonnet is all right for looks, but how about her acts? It's going to be strictly handsome is as handsome does, to-day," warned Baldie.

"Oh, my ears will be all right," replied Katherine, carelessly. "Come on, let's go!"

"Whoa, here!" replied Baldie, taking her by the arm. "Haven't you got anything warmer than that?"

Katherine pulled away from him.

"May I inquire who gave you any right to dictate what I shall wear?" she demanded pettishly.

"Oh, all right," retorted Baldie, thrusting his hands deep into his trousers' pockets. "Only you can't go driving with me with nothing warmer than that on your head. A pair of frozen ears are no joke."

He strolled about the Graysons' drawing-room, whistling.

Katherine looked wrathfully at his back. But she wanted very badly to go automobiling. She wanted to go so that Paolo, instead of pitying her for having to spend an afternoon in the drawing-room with Baldie, would have to sit at home gnawing his moustache (figuratively speaking) because he could not take any fair lady out himself. Katherine went upstairs and got a fur cap which she disliked intensely, and came down with it on.

She had not seen Paolo, so, before she got into the car, she leaned over the door, and pretending a playful mood, made the horn cough thrice. Paolo's room was in the front of the house, next the pink guest-room, and Paolo, she knew, would look out of the window when the horn honked, and if he did not already know that Baldie was taking her out, he would know it then.

(4)

Once on the boulevard, Katherine rather forgot Baldie's uncouthness. A big 'possum coat and cap were becoming to Baldie; and gauntlet gloves and a steering-wheel suited his square sturdy hands.

He was a good driver, too. That is, he drove to Katherine's taste. His mild blue eyes never took themselves from the road, nor his hands from the wheel; but he made speed recklessly. His career was dotted with fines like a country-road with mile-stones.

To-day, however, he was more than observing the speed-limit. Katherine glanced sidewise at him once or twice, wondering what was the trouble.

As they approached the Reservoir, Baldie slowed down still more. A very red nose and one eye were all that Katherine could see of his profile; but that one eye looked thoughtful.

"All right, Baldie," she said resignedly, "out with it! What's the trouble?"

"Just thinking," laughed Baldie ruefully. "That's trouble for little Archibald!"

"I should say so!" agreed Katherine, crisply. "But what were you thinking about?"

"About you."

"You're not going to propose, are you?" inquired Katherine suspiciously.

Baldie laughed, but with some constraint.

"I was sort of thinking I might propose being a brother to you," he hazarded.

"Thanks awfully," retorted Katherine. "But why this sudden ardor to become a relative of mine?"

"Oh—no reason—no reason!" stammered Baldie, hastily. Katherine surveyed him keenly. What was the matter with him? What was he trying to say, or do?

"For goodness' sake, Baldie, out with it!" she exclaimed, pettishly.

"Why, any girl needs a brother at times—to—sort of put her wise"—Baldie floundered sadly, but kept pluckily on, "about things—about—fellows, and the way they look at things ——"

"Oh."

"There are fellows that it's a darn sight better for a girl not to see too much of."

"Indeed. How intensely interesting!"

Under the lash of Katherine's sarcastic emphasis, the little blue car jumped forward; then slowed again with a jerk.

"Well," said Baldie, soberly, "I was wishing you had a brother for just about fifteen minutes to tell you some things about this Paul Grayson ——"

"And as I haven't," interrupted Katherine, speaking slowly and cuttingly, "you would be willing to serve in that capacity. I see! Well, Baldie, you are the last fellow in the world that I would have imagined would try to queer another man with a girl, behind his back!"

Baldie's hands tightened on the steering-wheel. He said nothing.

"Besides," added Katherine, with an oblique glance at him, "in this case, from what I have heard," (Angela was a great scandal-monger) "I should say it might be an instance of the pot calling the kettle black!"

The blue car leaped forward. The speed was suicidal. Katherine, for the first time in her life, was thrilled with a sensation akin to fear. She was

amazed, and, yes, frightened. She had never suspected the temper behind those mild blue eyes!

But apparently it was not Baldie's intention to plunge himself and her precipitately into the next world via a ditch or a wall. As a traffic officer loomed up in the distance, he slowed to a safer rate; but all the way into town they ran fast enough to preclude conversation. The keen wind stung their eyelids and stiffened their lips. Katherine was more than glad that she had on the sturdy fur cap instead of the dainty toque with its specious fur-bandings.

But she would not have admitted it for worlds. . . .

At the Graysons' door, Baldie said good-bye to Katherine, gloomily.

No, he would not come in. Must run along.

"Thank you for a pleasant ride," said Katherine, with intense formality.

"Thank *you!*" retorted Baldie, looking, Katherine thought, like a big sulky, bread-and-butter baby.

He certainly, like a big, sulky baby, needed disciplining. By way of discipline, Katherine added loftily, as she turned away to push the bell, "And, by the way, Baldie, you'd better forget that big brother stuff. When I need a big brother, I'll let you know."

The only reply Baldie made was under his breath, and sounded suspiciously as if it were not suitable for a lady's ears. He turned away, strode down the steps and across the sidewalk, jumped into the little blue car, and threw in the clutch with a venomous jerk.

Katherine entered the house hoping that Paolo might be in the front hall to see her come in. But he

was not. He was shut up in his room with Bernard Shaw.

(5)

He did not come down for dinner.

Mr. Grayson asked for him.

Angela explained: "He's up in his room. He won't come down."

"What's the matter? He isn't sick, is he?" inquired Mrs. Grayson, laying down her napkin in alarm. Angela, though her second child, had grown up; but Paolo was still her darling baby.

"Oh, no, Mother! Don't go up!" said Angela. "He won't want to be fussed over. I'll take him up something after dinner."

"No," commanded Mr. Grayson sternly. Mrs. Grayson and Angela looked up in surprise. "If he wants anything to eat he can come down. It's time he got over that baby habit of his. You women spoil him. Let him sulk it out for once."

"Very well, Father," replied Angela, meekly; "I just thought ——"

"I know what he's in the sulks about," interrupted Mr. Grayson irately. "It's this auto business. He's got to learn that he can't always have what he wants. . . . The trouble is, Paul thinks his father is a large-sized, gilt-edged edition of a J. D. Rockefeller; and he may just as well be disillusioned now as later. Let him sulk it out!"

"Oh, does Paul want you to buy him a car, Father?" inquired Angela, with interest.

Katherine smiled slightly to herself, agreeably flattered; for she thought she knew why Paolo was so especially anxious to have a car of his own.

"Mercy!" began Mrs. Grayson, in a nervous flutter, "I should expect Paolo to smash up the first time ——"

"Well, you don't any of you need to worry," interrupted Mr. Grayson grimly, "for I'm not going to buy him one."

"But when Paolo wants a thing," retorted Angela sweetly, "you may be sure he'll get it by hook or crook. Even if he has to steal it."

The innocent prophecy sounded, to Katherine, almost sinister.

(6)

The following day there was a midwinter blizzard, out of season. The stinging flakes drove whirling and smacking against the window-panes and plastered them with snow. Outside through the storm could be seen the white drifts piling waist-high, and bare patches of ground across which the fine sleet drove in sheets. Now and then a solitary pedestrian struggled by, shielding his head with one arm and fending forward with the other as if beating his way through the thickness of the wind. Occasionally a market-wagon, the horse with its nose at its knees, plowed through the drifts. Neither Mr. Grayson nor Paolo went out. There were fires in all the fireplaces. Within the house there was a drowsy atmosphere of coziness, warmth, and security.

Katherine had settled herself before the library fire with a light—very light—novel.

She was far from being in a mood for reading. She turned the pages listlessly, or forgot to turn them at all, while she half-dreamed, half-dozed in the comfortable chair and wished pettishly that there was something exciting to do. Paolo was sitting in another chair somewhat back of her, with his Bernard Shaw. He was intent upon the book. He held it between his face and the sight of Katherine. Angela was seated on the other side of the hearth, embroidering a camisole for her Hope-Chest.

The clock ticked monotonously on the mantel. It was a handsome clock in a glass dome, and it would tick monotonously for eight days without being wound. Angela applied all her faculties to the placing of French knots at proper intervals. Paolo was absorbed in his book. Katherine fluttered the leaves of hers and yawned.

After some time Angela, with a glance at the clock, rose hurriedly, and laying down her work, left the room.

Simultaneously, as if they had been worked by the same spring, Paul lowered his book and looked at Katherine, and Katherine swung around in her chair toward him.

"I've something to say to you." He spoke rapidly. "I take this opportunity because I shall perhaps have no other. *Hai ragione*, my friend: you are right. I have pursued you in an ungentlemanly manner." He lifted, absent-mindedly, the fringed edge of her skirt

an inch or so with the toe of his boot, and again, absent-mindedly, let it fall. "You have showed me that fact. Perhaps in no too gentle manner, but let that pass. I shall pursue you no longer. You are cold. You are—an American. It is all said. The remainder of your visit shall be as undisturbed by my unwelcome solicitations as you could wish. After all, we may be glad that nothing ——"

Angela's step was heard. She reëntered the room. Paolo's book was up before his face. Katherine was absorbed in her novel.

"There!" exclaimed Angela in vexation as she was about to seat herself, "if I didn't go 'way up-stairs—and then forgot ——" She was gone again.

The books were down. Katherine was turned to hear the end of the sentence.

"—that nothing has happened which we might have had to regret."

"Well, it can wait. I shan't go up again on purpose!" Angela returned and sat down. Her companions' positions had apparently not changed. Paolo's book was up before his face. Katherine was absorbed in her novel.

"You are the most lifeless-looking people!" exclaimed Angela. She picked up her embroidery.

(7)

The girls came down tardily to dinner that evening. Angela's eyelids and nose were red and swollen. Katherine looked perturbed.

"Why, dear child, what is the matter?" demanded Mrs. Grayson.

"Miss Howard's been in one of her iconoclastic moods," guessed Paolo carelessly. "She has been smashing Angela's household gods; isn't that it, Miss Howard?"

Katherine flushed.

"And the sight of all the little tin gods lying with their little heads and legs knocked off reduced our tender-hearted Angellina to tears," continued Paolo mildly. "That's what it is to keep one's Lares and Penates where people can get at them!"

Katherine, her eyes bent on her plate, looked more and more ill at ease. Angela's face mirrored her friend's discomfort.

"What was it this time, Miss Howard?" Paolo continued, fully aware of her discomfort. "Freud?"

Katherine turned red.

"It was really I that started it," protested Angela. "I was speaking of—that is, something brought up the subject of marriage and got us going; and before we stopped I really had begun to feel as if marriage were a horrid whited sepulchre."

"Full of awful creepy crawly things hidden in the dark—and our Angy never was too brave!" nodded Paolo, much amused.

"And as if," continued Angela tearfully, "love and all that sort of thing were a big hideous practical joke on us. And, as Paolo says, it frightened me. It is so terrifying to think how easily all the *meaning* and *dignity* could go out of life! . . . And Kitty be-

lieves it, and she doesn't care. And when she says those awful materialistic modern things about people's suppressed desires and self-deceptions, and things, it almost convinces you. That's what scares me: it's the self-deception! Supposing she's right, and it's all a cruel practical joke—all our aspirations, and ideals, and ——”

“Mercy!” broke in Mrs. Grayson. “Angela, stop it! I won't have you giving us all indigestion with Katherine's cynicism!”

“Mamma, you don't understand,” put in Paolo smoothly, in great delight. “Miss Howard has been working out a philosophy of life—from experience. Just as you—from the systematic contradiction of experience—are trying to work out yours. Behold a fellow pilgrim to the shrine of truth! You, my dear mother, are striving to cast off the bonds of materialism. (And, incidentally, let me remark that a good Christian Scientist should hardly mention an affliction so non-existent as indigestion!) You fancy that you are getting at a religion: it is only a philosophy; and not a new one at that. Miss Howard has undertaken the somewhat less difficult task of discarding idealism. To a pragmatist, one is as profitless and interesting an effort as the other. You wish to reduce the Universe to a formula—poor little students of life!” He waved his hand airily; a dreamy look came into his black eyes; a sort of film settled over them. “Be, my friends, like me—an eclectic. Maintain a mind open to the conviction of the moment. Our Angy, just because she is in love with Harold, does not want to

think that when Harry, trembling in mute and holy adoration, touches her hand, and the little thrills run up her arm and prick down her spine ——”

“Paolo, you are unbearable!” cried Angela hotly, jumping up and running out of the room.

“Paolo, that was really too bad!” protested Mrs. Grayson nervously, eyeing a nicely broiled squab *couchant* on a circle of buttered toast which had just been set before her.

“But Mother, it’s true!” persisted Paolo, aggrieved. “Our Angy, because she has thrills when Harold touches her, wishes to disguise from herself that the thrills are a manifestation of a quite commonplace instinct which also governs the actions, periodically, of pussy-cats and guinea-piggesses and cows and turtle-dovesses and all the rest of Angy’s half of creation. Therefore she constructs a new heaven and a new earth—minus earth. In which Harold and she are beings compact all of light and romantic electricity, I presume. How mad! How utterly mad!” Paolo smiled compassionately. “Sometime, after they have been married five years and their romance stops and their babies continue ——”

“Paolo!” cried Mrs. Grayson scandalized.

“Mother, weren’t we all babies once?” protested Paolo, unabashed. “Sometime, when, as I was saying ——”

“You don’t need to repeat it!” interrupted Mrs. Grayson hurriedly.

“Well, then, when that inevitable moment arrives, Angela’s world of light and romantic electricity will

be shattered about her ears. It is a tragedy." He mused with a dreamy smile. "And then—poor Harold! He is so virtuous; so awfully, awfully, impracticably virtuous."

There was a pause. Mrs. Grayson ate with dignity.

"This is where," continued Paolo, "your social organization in this country is betrayed to the divorce-court: it blinks at naked facts. It puts a pink paper petticoat on primitive forces before it introduces them to your daughters. Your spoiled American girls are brought up to suppose that matrimony is all roses and whipped cream. The French Madame expects to be her husband's business partner; the German Frau expects to be his housekeeper. Your girls are not intelligent enough to be his business partner; they scorn to be his housekeeper; and yet—extraordinary blindness—they do not trouble themselves to be his mistress. So the independent wage-earner whose business is to maintain an illusion of desirability and to ally herself with primitive instincts that, for her, never had petticoats on, gets the advantage which she would never in nature have: she realizes that you do not get something for nothing in this old world. Then we have revelations, tears and hysterics, the roses and cream all upset, broken crockery, the divorce-court, and 'another American scandal.' And I tell you this abnormal social condition comes back to your pernicious idealism: the theory of romantic love, propounded in your saccharine American novels—a sort of bolt of psycho-electricity, which strikes the one man at the sight of the one woman of all the world, and thus

places him under an obligation to provide a permanent meal-ticket for her henceforth, with no question of value received!—Schopenhauer, my dear mother, is the old fellow you and Angela need to read on that! How old Dame Nature must laugh at us! Trying always to hide the truth about ourselves under a silly fig-leaf! As if She cares ——”

“Paolo,” said Mrs. Grayson sharply, “that’s enough. Eat your dinner. Katherine, the less you think about such things the better it will be for you. I don’t like you to talk so to Angela.”

They ate in silence. Katherine was scarlet. Angela, who had stolen back to her broiled squab, of which she was very fond, dared not raise her eyes from her plate. Paolo preserved an amused and meditative air of detachment. Through it all, Mr. Grayson had been eating, wrapped in a brown study.

With the coming of the finger-bowls, he awoke suddenly, almost ludicrously oblivious to all that had passed, and remarked, “By the way, Katherine, that copper stock of yours is up fifteen points above where you bought it. You can sell it in a month or more at a profit of twenty-five.”

(8)

This opening of a brand new topic of conversation was a relief to everybody.

“Three cheers!” cried Katherine. “Then I shall have enough money to buy a car!”

“Do you want a car, too?” asked Paolo, turning to her with some interest.

"Yes," she answered. "Something to get on with! Something that goes faster, faster, faster, and needs never stop!"

"A long way in a short time," suggested Paolo.

"Just that. A long way in a short time."

"Oh, Father, by the way, there's a Vite-Turenne demonstrator going to bring out a new-model sedan next week for us to look at," remarked Paul, ingenuously.

"What!" ejaculated his father. "There is! Who told him to?"

"Why," replied Paolo, raising his eyes innocently to meet with disarming guilelessness his father's astounded gaze, "I happened to be down at the Vite-Turenne place yesterday and one of the salesmen said he'd like to come and take us out some afternoon for a little spin. I knew you wouldn't mind. It won't do any harm. You don't have to buy one. He doesn't expect that you will; but of course he likes to show his car."

"Well!" ejaculated his father, bursting into a big laugh. "Have your way, my boy, have your way! Looking at an automobile is a long way from buying one!"

"But Paolo will get what he wants yet," murmured Angela, rippling with amusement.

"I wonder?" mused Katherine to herself. Raising her eyes, they met Paolo's. He nodded, slightly, smiling.

As they left the dining-room, Paolo, who had offered

his arm to Katherine, an unwonted civility on his part, detained her a moment.

"What did you mean?" he murmured.

"By what?" she asked.

"'A long way in a short time'?"

She flung back her head. She was gloriously conscious of the gallery as represented by Paolo. "To get all the fun that's coming to you—eat, drink, and be merry; and then, before pay-time . . . skip out."

She stopped. Paolo was looking at her through narrowed, amused eyelids. He looked infinitely old, and tolerant, and wise.

"My dear child," he said indulgently, "you'd jump heroically, and the water would get all in your eyes and ears and up your nose, and then someone would come and pull you out, and you'd be so wet and drippy;—and you'd feel so small!"

He paused. Katherine was flushed with angry mortification.

"I don't mean," he said kindly, "that your idea is any the less heroic or sincere; it's only that things like that don't happen. 'Twouldn't be your fault, but there'd be a fluke somewhere. It's the people who don't want to die that die. . . . And as for your Epicurean philosophy—oh, you child!—*You haven't had any fun at all yet*, and you talk as if you were about ready to 'skip out'!"

They had come now, slowly, into the hall; and as he released her, he said to her, "The trouble, Katherine, with you is, you don't know what you do want."

She moved hastily from him. "Where's your letter, Angela?" she called. "I'm going to run out with mine to the letter-box."

Paolo, who had started up-stairs, wheeled. "No, indeed you're not. It's a fearfully bitter night. Here, give me the letters."

"No, no!"—but she surrendered the letters to him—"please don't! They can wait till morning!"

"Will you open the door for me so I won't have to wait outside?" he asked.

She followed him into the vestibule, closing the inner door behind her.

"You're awfully good," she said.

"I'm glad of a slight chance to reinstate myself in your favor," he replied, looking up eagerly at her as she stood on the vestibule steps above him.

"I wish you wouldn't go!" she urged. "Shouldn't you have an overcoat?"

"No!" He scorned it, and was gone.

She descended the steps and stood by the great door, looking out at a narrow leaded side-window. It was a bitter night. A whistling wind swirled up the street, driving the few pedestrians in a whirl of skirts and coat-tails, and re-mounding the drifts with flurries of fine stinging sleet. She was touched at the thought of Paolo's going out in such a night for her.

He came dashing up the steps, puffing and blowing. She swung the door open.

"Whew!" he ejaculated as he entered. "Thanks! *Dio*, but it's a night!"

"Are you frozen?" she asked breathlessly. At last Katherine knew what she wanted, and he knew—in his wisdom—that she knew it.

"Not now!" he cried, exultantly.

A moment she resisted fiercely; a moment she yielded awkwardly to his kiss. Then with a wild sob, she broke away from him and stumbled up the marble steps to the inner door.

He sprang after her, and laid a controlling hand, which yet shook, on her arm.

"Adagio!" he warned, in a low tone. "Don't go in till you've got yourself in hand! Remember, they're in there!"

Katherine swayed against the door, holding by the knob and resting her forehead against the glass.

Silence.

Suddenly she straightened.

"We will go in now," she said in a quiet voice. Their eyes flashed a look between them, ardent, burning. She opened the door. They entered the music-room where Angela was seated at the piano playing the "Kiss Waltz."

"Isn't it cold out?" she asked, looking up as her brother and her guest entered the room.

"Yes, rather," said Paolo. "This heat's all the more welcome. Ah, there's a philosophical reflection for you! How should we appreciate warmth but for preceding cold?"

"Uh? Uh?" grunted Mr. Grayson, waking up from a doze in his big chair. "Where have you been, Paul?"

"Just out to mail a letter for Miss Howard, sir," replied his son respectfully.

"Are you sure you shut both doors, Paolo?" fidgeted his mother. "I seem to feel a draught."

He went dutifully to see. There could not have been a more attentive son and brother than Paolo that evening. The family appreciated his thoughtful behavior, all the more that it was so rare.

(9)

Before long, Mrs. Grayson went up-stairs to her room to figure household accounts, and Mr. Grayson got up heavily and took himself off to his den for another cigar. Katherine came over to the piano. Songs welled and bubbled in her. She was quite changed! It seemed to her as if everybody must notice it. In this less than an hour, she had become softened, sweet and womanly. She was moulded new—by a kiss! She looked over Angela's shoulder and sang the song that Angela was playing. There were "clasp me's" and "kiss me's" in it, and the music, written irresponsibly to titivate the nervous systems of people who were willing to pay for thrills, vibrated in amorous "clasp me's" and "kiss me's" of melody. Katherine's strong, young voice held a deeper thrill. It seemed as if Angela, herself so experienced in love, must hear it! But Angela was thinking of Harold while she played.

Paolo drew to the piano, and posed opposite his guest, where he could catch the uplift of her lashes and flashing glance across at him. He leaned on his

elbow, watching her ardently, humming a second part in a mellow voice, magnetic, agreeable, a little false. How unsophisticated she was! He forgot himself slightly, and pushed his foot against hers. She gave him a frightened frown that intoxicated him.

Angela was called to the telephone.

They leaned toward each other, swift, tense.

"Now you will never run from me again," he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Why will I not?" she whispered.

"Because I have kissed you."

"Oh, hush!"

"Are you sorry?"

"No." She raised her eyes and gave him look for look. She wished him to see that she understood perfectly—and that she was glad. Glad!

But it was not her mental reactions that Paolo was interested in. He was looking at the virginal blossoming of her. With his greedy, downward gaze, he seemed to devour the bold shyness, the unadmitted timidity of the surrendered super-girl.

In spite of herself, Katherine blushed, dropped her eyelids.

"But you must never ——" she began uncertainly.

He was not listening to her. His head was lifted!

"Be careful!" he whispered with a quick change of tone. The Byronic Hero had become, abruptly, the small boy in the jam closet. "Someone is coming!"

How quickly she was learning the love-game! When Angela entered, she was reading off the words of a comic ditty on the back sheet of the "Kiss

Waltz," printed beneath the legend "Try this over on your piano." Paolo, with all his experience in snatching forbidden sweets, was less at his ease than she. He was walking about, hands in pockets, and whistling.

"I'm sorry to have had to interrupt the concert!" said Angela. "It was Baldie. He's just around the corner and wants to come up. I told him to come along."

She seated herself on the chair which Katherine had vacated.

"Let's begin this chorus over again," she suggested.

"All right," agreed Katherine. But Paolo was scowling; he went off up to his room rather than share honors with the Cub.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONQUERING HERO

(I)

"GETTING kisses from a girl," Baldie was fond of quoting in his dreadful, vulgar way, "is like getting olives out of a bottle: once get the first one and the rest come easy."

To the truth of this generalization, Paolo could have testified; and there was nothing about his experience with Katherine to convince him to the contrary.

If, just along at the first, even the bold super-girl had been afraid at playing the big new love-game, and had felt uncertain of her security, she was afraid or uncertain no longer. She had herself set a limit. She had set a limit to madness, and Paolo had agreed to it. He had given his word of honor.

It was, comparatively speaking, a conservative limit. Katherine—who wished to impress Paolo as a singularly reckless, sophisticated woman-of-the-world—was chagrined to discover how dismayingly ignorant, and how embarrassingly proper, her unknown self was. But Paolo accepted what little favors she gave, and apparently was satisfied.

And meanwhile old Dame Nature sat by at the petting-parties and smiled, sleepily. She liked to see

their play. Paolo saw her sitting by, and dozing, and smiling at their play. He smiled with her.

(2)

One afternoon after the weather ameliorated, a sleek, expensive-looking little sedan slid silently up to the curb before the Graysons' house, and stopped. Mr. Grayson was in the seat beside the driver. He was looking pleased with himself. There was no mistaking the elegant perfection of the little Vite-Turenne. He had enjoyed the trial spin. Paul, who had diplomatically occupied the back seat, smiled as he noted the proprietorial air with which his father eased his portly bulk out of the small door.

"Send the girls out, mio padre; there's time for a little ride for them." Paolo was anxious to have as many allies as possible.

The day itself was conspiring with him. It was a glorious afternoon: chill in the shadows, but warm in the sun. In hedges, a faint spring-time budding showed, through rags of snow. It was a shame for anyone not to have a sleek little sedan in which to go out and (undisturbed by chilly breezes) meet the spring. Pedestrians, whom they had passed on the trial spin, had stared admiringly at the magnificent shining creature of steel and enamel, and (precisely as if they, too, were conspiring with Paolo) had cast envious or curious glances at Mr. Grayson, sitting in the proprietor's seat beside the driver. Mr. Grayson had seen every glance. . . .

(3)

On the way back from their ride, Paolo and his sister and Katherine stopped within the entrance of Franklin Park, below the Refectory, and got out to climb the walled and roofed ivy-grown stone staircase to the Refectory soda-fountain for some ginger-ale. After that they strolled around the broad vine-covered terrace. Below them the greensward dropped steeply to a ribbon of road far below, winding between knolls where sheep were nibbling the tender new grass. To the right lay smooth lawns and curving lanes. To the left a line of faint blue hills edged the vaporous horizon.

"All the world might be at our feet," murmured Paolo, *sotto voce*, to Katherine.

Angela, struck by her brother's tone, glanced quickly at him; and from him to Katherine, at whom he was gazing with an odd intentness. Katherine was looking down; she acted as if she had not heard Paolo's remark. But her color was curiously heightened. Angela observed her brother and her guest with sudden interest.

Till now, she had been so completely absorbed in her own affair with Harold, that she had had little thought to give to Paolo or his possible machinations. Now, suddenly awake to the situation, she commenced putting two and two together with startling results. Such and such a time she had encountered Paolo descending a staircase (with an air best described as furtive) and, a moment later, had overtaken Katherine slipping away in the opposite direction. Such and

such a time she had fancied she heard whisperings—suppressed scufflings—in a hallway or beyond a doorway. . . . Such a time, she remembered, they had lingered behind when the family left the drawing-room; and had come up a few minutes later, looking almost suspiciously cool and indifferent. Such and such an enigmatical remark of Paolo's recurred with startling significance to her mind; such and such a confused downward look of Katherine's. She recalled, now, what she had not thought of twice at the time, that coming into a room where Paolo and Katherine were sitting, innocently reading, she had had the vague sense of something electric in the air.

At the time, she had remarked each of the isolated incidents; at the time, each had caused her an instant's surprise; but never till now had they formed a chain of association in her mind.

Her mind was in a whirl of incredulity and righteous indignation. Katherine, of all girls!

She was dreadfully disappointed in Katherine. Katherine who had never had a love-affair, never been kissed, hated the men! Katherine, who had always been a confidante with no sentimental preoccupations of her own! Angela felt justly aggrieved. Katherine had cheated her. Katherine was deliberately deceiving her.

And what could such deception mean but that Katherine was doing something of which she knew that Angela would disapprove? Angela well knew her brother's methods (which she condoned in him because of his sex and temperament) but she always had

thought that Katherine had the strength of character ——! Katherine had never talked like a “nice” girl, but she had always heretofore acted like one. Even with Baldie, Angela was sure, Katherine had always been “nice.” But now ——

Could it be possible that Paolo for once was serious? She glanced at him. He was at that moment leaning forward addressing a remark to Katherine. He was calling her as always, “Miss Howard,” but Angela fancied that she detected a mocking intonation which implied the use of a less formal habit of address in private. Paolo for once seriously in love? The idea was strangely unwelcome to Paolo’s sister, and she set it hastily aside. He had always made her the confidante of his love-affairs (expurgated, of course); and she felt hurt and sore that he and Katherine should have united to cheat her. Such a deception could only mean that they were both doing something that they were ashamed of. Angela was disgusted. She would have expected it of Paolo, but she really had thought better of Katherine.

Not that Angela laid any very serious charges at the door of the flirtation whose existence she suspected. It did not occur to her to be alarmed. Catastrophe was beyond her ken. But like many another young person of high moral conscience and strict judgments, Angela knew from that most reliable source of information, experience, what sort of undignified follies disfigure the play-at-love, where love is not. She had learned, by experience, to make a large and charitable allowance for the weaknesses and frailties of the male

half of humanity: things are so difficult for them! She thought this knowledge was a good thing since it helped her now to understand some things about Harold which otherwise would have shocked her disastrously; but she was unwilling that Katherine also should learn for herself. Angela had the instincts of a reformer. She felt that she must warn Kathy at once, and put a stop to anything unadvisable that existed between the latter and Angela's brother—if anything did.

(4)

Dinner passed without unusual event.

Mr. Grayson was very thoughtful, and left the table early.

"He is going down to the Vite-Turenne place again!" whispered Angela, amused.

Katherine changed color. She had begun to feel superstitious about this spun-out duel between Paolo and his father: as if the purchase or the non-purchase of the car were to be a sign. She glanced stealthily at Paolo. Paolo was smiling—the smile of complacent confidence. . . .

After the coffee, instead of sitting in the library with "the young people," as was her custom, Mrs. Grayson went up-stairs to her desk, to make up some accounts. And then Angela, that well-intentioned girl, laid a trap; trusting the laudable end to justify the rather questionable means. Paolo and Katherine were both reading; Angela excused herself, saying that she had a slight headache and was going to bed;—and then,

five minutes later, she returned, to ask Kathy if she had any aspirin in her bag.

She wished—had intended—to slip back noiselessly; but for the life of her, she dared not cross the threshold till she had begun to hum a little tune. Still, there were evidences sufficient ——

With roving eyes, but sweetly, Angela made her inquiry about the aspirin, and received her answer from a Katherine who kept her eyes fixed on her book. Paolo was pacing the room, his olive face darkly flushed.

There was a moment's pause. Neither Paolo nor Katherine looked at Angela, but Angela, from the vantage-point of a serene conscience, looked at both.

"If I were you, Katherine," she remarked, drily, "I'd arrange my hair before Father returns."—And she walked out.

A few minutes later, Katherine followed her to bed. The two friends undressed in guarded silence.

It was Angela, who, at last, took the bull by the horns.

"Kitty," she demanded, without indirection, "are you in love with my brother?"

Katherine risked a laugh. "Oh, of course!" she retorted, as if derisively. "How could I help it—*your* brother, dearest girl!"

Angela became thoughtful. There was a short pause.

Katherine laughed again, lightly. "How would you like to have me for a sister, Angy, dear?"

"Has he asked you?" demanded Angela, quickly. Katherine smiled.

Angela studied the smile for a time. Then, coming apparently to some conclusion, she remarked, "Of course I should love to have you for a sister, Kitty, dear. But I don't think you'll have the chance to decide it. My brother is not a marrying man. . . . For one thing, he couldn't afford a wife."

(5)

The following day dawned chill and dismal. A fine drizzle grayed the view from the billiard-room windows where Katherine stood looking out. In the wet street below, umbrellas dripped, puddles increased, pedestrians two-footed and four-footed splashed through the thin mud on the streaming pavement, electric cars took on and debouched their moist, bedraggled passengers. The tall brick houses opposite, washed from overflowing gutters, presented a disconsolate aspect. Beyond and behind all, the river, flattened under the thick-beating raindrops, seemed at a standstill; its sluggish tide seemed to have paused.

"What a disagreeable day!" sighed Katherine petulantly, still looking out, with her back to the room.

"Oh, really?" replied Paolo, its only other occupant, chalking his cue by the table.

"Do be entertaining, Paolo!" she retorted, without turning. "Or, at least, if you can't be that, try to refrain from being disagreeable."

"Why should I?" inquired Paolo, coolly, making a

careful bridge of the thumb and first finger of one hand as he prepared for a fancy shot.

“ Oh, if to please me is no reason —— ! ”

Paolo shot; there were the click of balls, a series of light thuds, a gentle subsiding commotion upon the table, and Paolo's triumphant “ h'm ” before he replied, “ Mia cara Katherina, do you do so much to please me? ”

Katherine was silent. Her pride, and something deeper than that, was keenly wounded. Had her favors, then, gone for so little? She remembered, for the first time since she had abandoned it, that first limit to madness that she had set, and she perceived suddenly how far, how very far beyond that was her limit to-day. Nobody now, however charitable, could have called it proper. She realized in a flash of bitter self-abasement what she would have thought, a month ago, of a girl who could have done the things she was doing. And every moving-back of the limit had represented one more indulgence to Paolo. And now he had turned on her! He had turned on her because she couldn't give anything more. She *could* not. She reiterated it to herself vehemently, “ I can't! I can't! ”

And Paolo had turned on her! She was dumb with the injustice of it.

Paolo took a shot or two more, then laid down his cue, and glanced at her back. He crossed to the door and looked meditatively up and down the hallway. The floor was deserted except for them. He recrossed the room with that quick, alert step which Katherine

knew so well. But she did not turn. He thought her a glove, to be alternately picked up and cast off. Well, he should see! She kept a cold profile toward him.

"Look you, Katherine," he said, hurriedly, "there it all is, out there! Friendships can stagnate like a puddle on the sidewalk throughout a lifetime; passion has a tide! It must progress or retrogress. It pauses only to begin the ebb."

He had not kissed her; he had not touched her; yet she felt paralyzed, petrified by his nearness.

He leaned to her ear, yet not so much as brushing a fold of her dress with his body.

"It has come to the place where it must have its will with us; or ebb."

Her eyes widened slightly as if in a sudden fright. She could not bear to have it ebb! The threat of it made her grow icy cold. She turned; and saw his face. Then slowly she withdrew from him, back and back, her eyes fixed fascinated upon his, whose gaze terrified her.

A question she had not meant to ask formed on her lips. "Do you mean to marry me, Paolo?" she stammered.

His whole face changed like a lightning-flash. An intense disgust distorted it; contempt and scorn curled his lips. He straightened back with a jerk.

"Oh, you true woman!" he ejaculated with a short, furious laugh. "You all have your price! Why, Katherine, do you think I would *buy* your favors? Do you think that anything not given freely is of value to me? What have you that I can't buy in the

market excepting only the frank desire of *me* which can't be bought? Oh, you utter little mercenary wretch! What are you offering me? A *trade*: so many legalized delights in exchange for—a meal ticket! No, my dear girl!”

“So!” cried Katherine, trembling, at white heat. “So you would take everything and give *me* nothing in exchange! You are asking me . . . And yet at the mention of the price, you draw back. Oh, I wonder you are not ashamed to look me in the face!”

“There, you see!” he retorted contemptuously, smiling from an immeasurable mental height. “If I will pay, I can have! Oh, you chaste, prudent virgins! You display your wares charily: half-seen-half-hidden entices most surely. You are careful to have a written promise to pay, signed and sealed and witnessed before you deliver the goods. Oh, you models of discretion and thrift! You have a chance to do just one big stroke of business in your lives, and you are well trained to make it a coup d'état. And we poor, impulsive, incautious men say your sex has no head for business! Pah! We're no match for you! You're all quivering, watchful, shrewd venders from the cradle up!”

Katherine had sunk back, half-supported by the window-sill and the casement. Now, as the last word ceased, she rallied desperately.

“It's not my price!” she cried, at bay. “It's not right! You know it's not right.”

“*Questo e vero!* It's not right—till your meal-ticket is safeguarded by law and church! . . .

Oh—my delight, which you would have me purchase,—Katherine, Katherine,—why is it not purchased fairly by the delight that I shall give you?”

Her lids drooped, she turned her face half away, her head hung back, she flung out her hands against him. “Oh, no, no!” she gasped. “Go! Go away!”

He paused. “You mean that? Katherine—Katherine—you have gone so far, such a long, long road, and you will now look over the precipice and turn quietly back?”

“Oh, yes, yes! I will turn back!”

There was a long pause, during which she did not open her eyes. Then his footsteps sounded, receding slowly across the room.

Katherine opened her eyes with a start. He had gone! . . . Well, why not? She had sent him.

She straightened. She laid her palms and forehead against the window-glass. Its cool touch revived her. She went into the alcove and sat down and thought. She was glad that she had said that to him about marrying her, for his answer had revealed his true attitude to her, and had freed her from him. He could never have any power over her again. Her very self-respect, which he had lashed so mercilessly and so unjustly, would not permit that. . . . One of those queer, unaccountable freaks of memory, which we have all experienced, flashed an isolated fragment of history before her mental vision. Huntington Clarke, sitting on a stone step of the villa. He had punished cruelly with a little whip a pup that he was training; and then he had called it and it had crawled

back to him, belly to the ground, and licked his hand. It had somehow been a shameful, intolerable sight to Katherine. . . .

(6)

Paolo, all day, was frigid and distant. He was very much displeased with her. Katherine carried her head high, and was gay; very gay indeed.

The day went.—Hobbledy-hoy.

Toward night Katherine's sang-froid deserted her. She became pale and big-eyed. She could eat no dinner. She had a headache, she said.

"You'd better go to bed immediately after dinner," said Angela. "Sleep in the pink guest-room to-night. Then I shan't disturb you when I come to bed.—Oh, by the way, did I tell you? Father just telephoned. He has bought the sedan!"

The blood contracted violently in Katherine's heart. Her eyes met Paolo's.

"Yes, do that, Katherine," said Mrs. Grayson, looking nervously at their guest. "A good night's rest is just what you need."

"Yes," echoed Paolo, with a slight smile, "a good night's sleep is just what you need."

Katherine drank a glass of water, spilling some.

They left the table. Katherine lingered in the library.

"Come, Kathy," called Angela, from the staircase. Katherine started.

"Good-night, Katherine," said Mrs. Grayson, tak-

ing the girl's hand. "Why, your hand is like ice! I hope you're not going to have a chill. Get straight to bed. Ignore your fever: it does not exist. God, love, truth, contradict sin, disease, and death. Take that thought to bed with you, Katherine."

"Thank you," replied Katherine breathlessly. "I've no doubt I shall be all right in the morning. Good-night, Mrs. Grayson.—Good-night." This to Paolo.

She dared not raise her eyes to his. He held her hand, as his mother had done.

"*Buone notte!*" he said. "I wish you, as my mother did, 'good-night!'" He added lightly, "Do you know your Shelley?"

"What nonsense are you talking to Katherine, Paolo?" called Angela, sharply, from the staircase. "Send her straight along."

"You hear!" exclaimed Paolo, earnestly. "I am to send you straight along to bed. In case you are wakeful, the Shelley is on the table in the guest-room—a little green book. If you see—ghosts, don't scream! And hold fast my wishes for—a good night. Don't forget Shelley."

"Good-night," murmured Katherine faintly.

Angela bundled her off to bed directly with much Scientific advice and an un-Scientific hot-water bottle as a concession to Mortal Error. She snapped off the light, raised the window, looked out for a moment across the balcony which ran below it and the windows of the room next it, which was Paolo's, into the deep dusk of the outer night, remarked how dark a sky it was, and kissed her friend good-night.

"Sleep well, Kitty," she said kindly. "If you want anything in the night, just call."

"Yes, yes," replied Katherine, shivering. "I'm only nervous. I shall be all right in th-th-the m-morning."

The moment the door closed behind Angela, Katherine sprang up and flashed on the light.

The little green leather-bound volume of Shelley's love-poems was lying on the table. Katherine's fingers, trying to pick it up, fumbled it; turning its pages in feverish haste, at the same time with frightened reluctance, they tore one. But at last she found it: Shelley's Good-Night, that cryptic message from Paolo to her.

Having read it, she dropped the book.

She stared across the room, into a mirror. Her eyes, in the mirror, stared back, dark and fateful. They told her what of the future she was fain to know, and yet dared not know. . . .

(8)

Angela sat late that night, writing to Harold:

"Mother is so vexed about it! I packed K. off to bed early this evening and had a chance to consult with her. Poor mother! She can't quite get over the delusion that Paolo is her little lamb. 'Not—flirting with her! I can't believe it!' said Mother. 'Why, Angela, are you quite sure? I've seen nothing!' 'It's been going on under our eyes, nevertheless,' replied I. And then I told her that I had practically caught them at it.

"'Whatever shall we do, Mother?' said I. 'We

can't send her home, you know, and it really must be put a stop to. Katherine's far too nice a girl to be allowed to make a fool of herself over Paolo.' And then I told her what K. had said about being my sister.

"‘Oh, of course that's nonsense!’ replied Mother. ‘Paul can hardly marry when he can't make money enough to support himself; not to mention a wife! That's out of the question. I'm sure Paul would never think of such a thing! But still—yes—of course, if Katherine is getting foolish ideas in her head, they must be nipped in the bud at once. Paul will have to go away until she goes home.’

"‘What if he won't?’ said I.

"‘*He will have to,*’ said Mother. ‘*Or his father will stop his allowance!*’

"As you know, Harold, Father can ramp and roar and set his mighty foot down thump, and Paolo just smiles and works him all the same; but when Mother says ‘He will have to!’ in that tone of voice, it means business!

"Poor Kitty! I am very much afraid she has made a little fool of herself about my brother; and men *never* respect the girls they can flirt with. How happy we are, Harold! Do you realize it? Suppose you didn't love me ——"

It was late when Angela finished her letter. Everybody was in bed long since. The great house was wrapped in silence and darkness, except for the faint blue glow of night-lights in the hallways. She undressed and put on her warm dressing-gown and slippers, and, putting the heavy shade on her electric lamp, she threw the room into dusk. Taking a little black leather-bound volume of "Science and Health" from her book-shelf, she sat down by the lamp, and

read a chapter in it as she would have read a Bible. Monstrous shadows lay silently across the ceiling. Shapes stood in the farther gloom of the corners of the room. Giant fingers of shadow pointed steadily on the walls.

Suddenly she interrupted her reading and listened. She fancied she had heard a sound—the echo of a cry. She could hear only the sudden loud beating of her heart. She rose, and tiptoed to her door, and opened it. The night-breeze blew in from the hall, lifting her white night-dress, that hung straight and virginal from her shoulders to her feet like a shroud, and floating it backwards against her knees. The hall was chilly. She listened. There was no sound in all the house.

Suddenly chimes broke the silence. Four quarters played their complete tune: upon the last note broke a low, deep tone resounding twice upon the night.

“Two o’clock!” thought Angela, shocked. “I shall be a wreck to-morrow!” She closed the door hastily, and went to bed.

(9)

Toward morning Katherine fell into a light sleep. Dawn was flushing the river when she awoke again. The early light was flooding the chamber. She sprang up, took her shower in the white-tiled bath, looked at herself wonderingly in a mirror, and dressed. She sang softly as she dressed. She stole down-stairs. The house was still asleep. She could hear Paolo’s heavy breathing as she paused a moment at his door.

She fancied how he would look, lying exhausted and asleep. A feeling of tenderness, new and almost maternal, woke and stirred within her, at the image. Let him sleep well!

She went out onto the street. The milk carts were finishing their rounds; an empty street-car lurched along past; housemaids were burnishing the door-plates and scrubbing the front steps of the neighboring houses. There was an air of alertness everywhere. Katherine walked rapidly down the street and across the Charles River Bridge. The river rippled swiftly along beneath her. Everything was moving. A confused sense of joy possessed her and impelled her to move with the spirit of the morning. She walked on, buoyantly and rapidly. She hardly realized how far she was going.

When she returned to the house, she found herself late for breakfast. Angela and her mother were still at the table, but Mr. Grayson and Paolo had breakfasted and gone, the former into town, the latter to his room, where Angela presently joined him.

What was that for?

There was something uncomfortable in the air. Katherine was certain of it. Mrs. Grayson looked guilty, and Katherine fancied that it was she herself who was looking guilty. Each woman fancied the other had detected the secret cause of her own constraint.

An hour passed. Angela had not yet come down from Paolo's room. What was her business there, Katherine could only uneasily surmise. Her joyous

mood was flattening out. The reaction had set in. Excitement was ebbing and fatigue was beginning to tell. She began to feel nervously jaded, irritable, and discontented. A vague terror crept in upon her.

Old Dame Nature had stopped smiling. She had been gulled, cheated, made a toy of, played with and then outwitted in the event, disappointed in her eternal, darling object. She was cross with Katherine. She laid on the lash.

Katherine did not know that that was the trouble; and Paolo, expounder of the dangerous old Dame's attitude in such matters, was not now present to explain. Katherine tried to read, but the print swam before her eyes. Finally she fell asleep in her chair.

She awoke with a start, sometime later, to hear the reverberation of the closing of the heavy outer door. She sat up. She was sore and stiff in every muscle. She looked, in a daze, at the clock. It registered a quarter to twelve. How long she had slept! A sudden return current of thought pricked her from her sluggishness and sent her hastening to the window to see who had gone out. Paolo was walking down the street.

A certainty of disaster seized her. Something was wrong! He did not return to luncheon. All the afternoon she prowled restlessly about: would he never come?

(10)

Toward evening, as she was dressing in Angela's room, she heard the outer door down-stairs close

heavily, and her heart jumped into her throat. Following the sound of the door came Paolo's voice, indolent and carrying, "Where is everybody?"

How she wished she had been dressed! With fingers that trembled so that she could hardly fasten her lingerie clasps, she hastened to complete her toilette, and descend. But Mrs. Grayson was before her. Katherine heard her voice in the library where she was talking with Paolo.

Katherine now found herself, after so many hours of desiring Paolo's presence, physically incapable of entering the room where he was. Her knees trembled and threatened to dissolve beneath her; she clutched the balustrade for the support which she fancied that she needed. Her breathing would not be regulated; her breath came short and insufficiently. Her heart thumped; her voice had failed.

She was dismayed at this mutiny of her physical forces. She wandered aimlessly through the other rooms on the floor, striving to regain her self-control. At last, with an effort, she succeeded in crossing the threshold of the library.

Paolo rose instantly.

"Good-evening," he said in a low tone.

She had stopped just inside the doorway and returned his salutation in a tone scarcely audible.

Their eyes met in a brief look.

She crossed the rug and seated herself in a deep chair. It seemed as if Mrs. Grayson must have noticed the oddity of their greeting, but she appeared not to have. She resumed her conversation with her

son. Katherine sat still, saying nothing, till the gong sounded for dinner.

About the middle of the salad course, Paolo announced his intention of going down to New York till after Easter. Katherine dropped her butter-spreader with a little clatter. Mr. Grayson looked up in surprise.

"What's this for, Paul?" he said.

Angela looked at her plate. Katherine stared intently at Paolo.

Going away? Why?

Mrs. Grayson essayed the feeble witticism about Easter bonnets, but her nervous glance at Angela betrayed her.

They were sending him away!

Katherine felt a spasm of fright that left her sick and dizzy. Had they found out, then ——? Her very soul turned cowardly at the thought.

"Well, don't expect to send the bill for your Easter bonnets to me," said Mr. Grayson, with marks of displeasure. "When was this trip decided on, sir?"

"Just decided," muttered Paolo, with an annoyed air.

"Well, then, you'd better undecide it!" announced Mr. Grayson, forcefully. "I'll be ——"

"Papa!" Mrs. Grayson interjected warningly.

"I'll be—*darned*—if I'm going to have you gadding about—spending money like water—and sending the bills home to ——"

"Oh, no, Papa"—Mrs. Grayson cut in again, in that dry, positive little tone before which Katherine

had often seen her Sturdy Oak bow like a broken reed, "a trip to New York will be very good for Paolo just now. He's a little run-down, and a change will do him good."

"Rot!" ejaculated Paolo. . . . Mrs. Grayson transfixed him with her eye. There was a brief pause.

"Paolo, you *are* run down," she resumed, gently, after that momentary duel of glances. "A change is what you need. . . . He is leaving to-morrow morning, Papa, on the Knickerbocker."

"Oh—he is!" grumbled Mr. Grayson. "Well, then, I suppose he is — . . . Angela!"

Angela jumped.

But Mr. Grayson only wanted her to pass him the bread.

Katherine made a swift deduction: Mr. Grayson knew nothing of the undercurrents; therefore nothing serious had transpired. For if anything serious had transpired, Mrs. Grayson would have gone straight to him with it. And dear innocent Angela would have been kept out of it.

Katherine began to breathe again. There could be only one explanation. Angela had told her mother of the mild flirtation which she had discovered, and the naughty children were to be separated. So, they were packing Paolo off for the rest of her visit.

A hot wave of crimson humiliation swept up to her brow. She felt like a small child who has had its hands slapped by its hostess and been sent home from the party in disgrace.

And Paolo was going! She looked at him again.

How could they make him go, if he was unwilling? She gazed at him wonderingly. How *could* he go? Reluctantly, against his will, as if her prolonged gaze had forced it, his own eyes met hers an instant and dropped before the wonder in them. He affected a dignified detachment. There was something infinitely small and pathetic in this affectation of dignity. It was as if he clutched the rags of his self-respect to him, and they would not meet.

She did not see him for a moment alone. Either Angela or Mrs. Grayson was always present and the two girls went to bed early. Angela turned away from her friend almost immediately and feigned sleep; but Katherine was sure from her breathing that she was awake.

Long after the breathing had become the light and regular breathing of genuine slumber, Katherine lay awake, wondering and wondering. It was impossible that he was going, without a word to her! And then strung nerves relaxed, and she buried her face in her pillow and stifled the sound of her grief. She was weeping for the Katherine that had been, and that could be no more.

(II)

She bore herself gallantly in the morning. He should see at least that she knew how to meet disaster. There were no tears, no recriminations. She perceived the dreadful error of the philosophy of pleasure that sent him out one Epicurean memory richer, and left her to face society bankrupt; she saw

now that he must have foreseen everything from the beginning, and known how, under given circumstances, she would act; she had been, she saw, a fool, and she had played his game for him. But she thought that the fool who drinks the dregs of his folly silently is at least less pitiable than he who throws the cup, too late, at the tapster. Paolo had played knave to her fool—doubtless had laughed in his sleeve all the way along at her little compunctions, her little resistances, knowing so well, all the way along, the end; but at least she could retrieve herself a little in his eyes now,—by her gameness, which he could hardly be expecting. His bags were ready. The maid was holding his overcoat. He had kissed his mother and his sister a hasty good-bye. And then he turned to Katherine.

“Good-bye,” he said. He was ashamed, desperately ashamed. His hand faltered in going out to offer it—self to hers.

But she gave him her hand. She looked him gallantly in the eyes. She said a courageous, game “Good-bye.”

They all followed him into the hall. A servant took his bags out to the waiting taxicab. He put on his coat. He picked up his hat and gloves. He said good-bye again. He opened the vestibule door.—And then Katherine weakened. She said, “Shall I ever see you, sometime?” She knew that she ought not to have. It had come out with a sort of gasp.

Angela fixed her eyes upon her brother. Paolo, flushed and ill at ease, glanced uncomfortably toward

his sister, and then replied, "You're very kind—I—but the truth is—I expect to be frightfully busy, you know. That is—it's possible that I may return at once to Italy. I should like—and possibly ——"

"Paolo knows," interrupted Angela sweetly and distinctly, "that Father is very anxious that he should complete his musical education before leaving Italy for any length of time; and *as he is practically dependent on the allowance which Papa gives him, of course he wouldn't want ——*"

"No; exactly," interrupted Paolo uncomfortably.

"Of course not!" agreed Katherine, with a vivid smile. "I understand—perfectly!"

The house-door, as Paolo closed it behind him, gave forth a bang that sounded suspiciously like a profane syllable, and the car-door, as he slammed it to, echoed the syllable. And both doors accurately expressed Paolo's sentiments toward everything in the universe—particularly his dear sister Angela. And even by the time the New York Express was an hour out of Boston, when he was sitting in a comfortably padded swivel-armchair *de luxe*, he was still sweating with the humiliation of it; and neither the thought that he was happily clear of what might have been a serious entanglement, nor the pleasant recollections of a satisfied Epicurean, could restore to him the tattered rags of his dignity.

As the door closed behind him, Katherine, left alone in the hall, had said quietly to herself, "So he was a cad as well as a knave!—Well—what is that to me?" Then a mist of red swam liquidly before her

eyeballs: was it blood? A puff of white smoke followed the doing of something dull and queer to her brain.

"Katherine?" called Angela's voice from the music-room.

"Yes?" Her tongue was thick like a drunkard's. She could not see the music-room door; but she started toward it, as she thought, and straightway fell over a chair. At this accident, she began to laugh immoderately, and to try to explain that she had f-fallen over a chair; and then, bursting suddenly into tears, she fled up-stairs to her room.

"Good gosh!" exclaimed Baldie Daggett, who had been admitted at the front door just in time to witness this dénouement. "What's the row?"

"Oh, nothing, Baldie," said Angela, crossly.

"Katherine has been a very foolish girl, that's all," replied Mrs. Grayson, with dignity.

CHAPTER VII

A POOR HAND WELL PLAYED

(I)

ANGELA dared not that whole morning go up to her room. She dared not face Katherine's mood. She felt, to tell the truth, rather mean; as if she had done something a trifle underhanded; something of which she was not quite proud. She spent a good deal of time in mentally justifying herself to her very tender conscience.

She was glad that she had an appointment with the dentist at eleven, and glad that her appointment was delayed so that she had to have her luncheon in town.

Mrs. Grayson, meanwhile, had a Christian Science luncheon on Newbury Street, followed by a meeting at which Angela was to join her. Katherine had not come down before she left the house. There was no sound from her. The upper floors were as still as death. Nothing to indicate Katherine's state of mind.

The club-meeting was at three and it lasted two hours. Angela could not focus her mind on the very excellent papers which were read on that edifying topic: Mortal Error. She was thinking of the moment when she would have to face Katherine's mood. She wished she had gone up-stairs in the morning and had it over with, once for all. Katherine's moods were

cumulative. They were like a big snowball set rolling down hill: the farther they rolled, the swifter they flew and the more rapidly their size increased. The longer Angela stayed away, therefore, the more difficult it would be, she felt, to face Katherine's accumulated mood. Yet the longer she stayed away the more eagerly she seized on every trivial pretext for delay. For once Angela felt herself a coward.

For she had done right; certainly she had done right. Paolo had no business to flirt with Katherine. Why, then, should she not face Katherine in the calm courage of that knowledge? She fancied herself saying to Katherine, not apologetically, but lovingly, "It was best for your sake, Kitty dear. My brother was flirting with you. Sometime you will thank me." But Angela was suddenly, as she fancied it put in words, stricken with a very large doubt as to whether Katherine would see it in that light.

Mrs. Grayson was irritated by Angela's nervousness. Katherine, as she put it, had behaved in a very silly manner. She was acting like a child, and she should be treated like a child. She should simply be let alone till she had recovered from her temper.

That was all very well, Angela thought, but how could she leave Katherine alone when the latter was camped out with her mood in Angela's bedroom?

Suppose (Angela put it to her mother, tentatively) that Katherine should not come down to dinner?

Then Katherine, Mrs. Grayson replied with dignity, would be acting in a very unladylike manner.

But suppose, Angela persisted, that Katherine did

act in that very unladylike manner, what should they do?

Mrs. Grayson thought that if Katherine had been so foolish as to fall in love with Paolo, she would hardly wish to blazon the fact to the whole world. Her pride, if nothing else, would naturally make her wish to cover it up, Mrs. Grayson was obliged to think.

"Ah, but," said Angela wisely, "you don't know Katherine."

It gave her, nevertheless, a slight hope of reprieve to see, as they entered their own front hall about half-past five o'clock, fresh visiting cards on the salver: Marie's and Bettina's; and to receive assurance from the maid that Miss Hunt and Miss Mason were still in the house—up-stairs with Miss Howard.

"I should say so!" commented Mrs. Grayson. "One hears it."

A peal of laughter floated down from upper regions. It was a sound of schoolgirl merriment—Katherine's merriment! Bettina's merriment joined it, in a shower of giggles, piercing, staccato. The duet of care-free young spirits at play rang out in pleasing antiphonies.

Angela looked at her mother, aghast.

Her mother nodded. "You see!" she said. "Katherine is doing the only sensible thing."

Mrs. Grayson's mind was off, already, on the trail of a missing item in the grocer's bill of that morning.

(2)

Katherine continued to do the only sensible thing. She greeted Angela with a careless, laughing, "Oh,

hello, Angela! For mercy's sake, come and sit on Betty's head! She's mad, sheer mad!" They were playing the children's game of Slap-Jack!

Slap-Jack!

She invited Angela, precisely as if nothing had happened, to join in the merriment of care-free young spirits at play. Were her eyelids a little thick? One could scarcely say; she kept them so wide open. Angela caught herself wondering, in bewilderment, if anything had, after all, happened.

Evidently Katherine had had no thought of not coming down to dinner. She had put on a wine-colored gown, cut very low in the back, clinging, and trailing a snaky little tail. She never had liked the dress—before. Now it seemed to fit a queer new mood in her as a glove fits the hand. Usually she was sparing of jewels. To-night she blazed with a sort of barbaric effulgence. Her throat she had clasped with a collar of garnets and light amethysts. A curious old pair of bracelets like manacles, locked each beneath a dull, dark blood-stone, but set naively with a pattern of rubies and brilliants—those encircled her wrists. Her fingers she had loaded with rings. The total effect was flamboyant, reckless, vividly beautiful.

Dame Nature, perhaps, absorbed in her one idea, and looking after her thwarted interests, put it into the head of Davis Standish Vaughn II to pay, that electric evening, one of his exquisitely formal, twenty-minute, bi-monthly calls on Angela. If he had known that Katherine was there, he would have chosen an-

other evening, for he did not approve of Katherine. He was most careful about such things. Every girl he called on, was, to Davis II, potentially a wife, and as such must be measured against the women already in his family. He called on no girl who did not square, in social standing and breeding, with this measure. He ran no risks in the placing of his affections, for he was a virtuous young man and contemplated no alternative to marriage. If Angela had been just a little more robust, he had often thought, she would have been just the wife for him. His parents, who had gone to school with her parents, would have liked to welcome Angela into the family: Angela was "such a sweet girl," and, it seemed, if not a brilliant match for Davis, at least a natural and happy one. Still they did not hurry him. They could trust him. He realized their claim, and he would never foist an undesirable daughter-in-law upon the family. If he did not seem to be paying suit to Angela more than to any other girl, they were not going to hurry him. He was only twenty-seven, and he had sixteen girls, in Boston and New York, on whom he called; and they were all nice girls with nice manners.

Angela liked Davis II (a good many girls liked Davis II). She always treated him kindly, and as a family friend. When he called, she was always glad to see him, and she was always glad when he went, reliably at the end of his twenty minutes. It was often hard to find anything to talk about with Davis. Most of the sixteen girls in Boston and New York upon whom Davis called would have testified that this coin-

cided with their own experience. They were always glad to see him, and glad that he could be relied on to take his leave in twenty minutes.

This, then, was an historic call of Davis's: he stayed three hours.

Davis's family, two days later, went abroad in the happy secret confidence that Davis would have something to tell them when they came back. Angela was a dear girl—would make a sweet and devoted daughter. They were very greatly pleased.

Angela had no idea that the Vaughns expected Davis to marry her. Nothing in Davis's manner suggested the suitor. The fact was that Davis II was a rather wooden young man, and he needed somebody who could (and would) set him on fire. None of the sixteen girls who measured up to the female Vaughns would have if they could. Davis had an instinct for immaculate, vegetable virtue. Paolo would have seen old Dame Nature sitting and leering at Davis; for Davis was one of those who hide themselves even from themselves. He had the scent for virtue; and all the time, secretly and unacknowledged, the woodenness of him was longing to be set on fire.

That was the real trouble with Angela, though he did not know it: she would never set him on fire.

No girl could have, honorably; Davis was so unimaginative, so wooden, and so enamored of virtue. He could not even go half-way, like flint to steel. He had to be kindled, if at all, by a brand of some other man's lighting.

Katherine, recklessly, irresponsibly flaming, set him

on fire; and new-made the world into a place where three hours could pass as twenty minutes.

He could not take his eyes from her. She, and her wine-colored gown, and her garnets and rubies and amethysts and bloodstones and brilliants emitted, for him, flame; and from her and her wine-colored gown and her jeweled throat and wrists and hands he caught a vertiginous fire of his own, and gloried in his own peril, and the certitude of his destruction.

It maddened Katherine to see him burn. It was as if Nature had added insult to injury by bringing his wood to her fire. What should she do with *him*?

And then, suddenly, it occurred to her what she might do with him. “‘Life ain’t,’” Baldie was fond of quoting, “‘in holding a good hand; but in playing a poor hand well.’”

She had thrown away an ace; but she still held some pretty high trumps.

(3)

On the next morning's mail, two letters came for Katherine. The superscription of one was in the well-known handwriting of the loyal but not very literary Baldie. Katherine tossed it to Angela with a laugh.

“Read it for me,” she directed.

The other letter bore a New York postmark. It was written on hotel stationery and addressed in a curious hand that, somehow, did not look quite genuine, to “Miss Katherine Howard, Personal.” Up in the corner of the envelope was the statement that the

letter, if not delivered in ten days, was to be returned to P. B. Shelley, at the appended address.

"It has been sealed and then pulled open again and resealed," commented Angela, observantly, taking the mysterious missive from Katherine's hand, and scrutinizing it carefully. She had a strong detective instinct, had Angela. "Who is P. B. Shelley?"

"Percy Bysshe, perhaps," replied Katherine, lightly; but suddenly she knew, with absolute certitude, from whom the letter must be; and, repossessing herself of it, she thrust it, as carelessly as possible, into the front of her blouse.

"Some advertisement, probably," she hazarded. She retrieved Baldie's letter also, and feigned to give it her whole attention till such time as she could, without arousing Angela's curiosity, steal away to a retired nook.

The letter from P. B. Shelley, which was written in a different hand from the artificial chirography on the envelope, began:

"MIA CARA KATHERINA:

"I owe you an apology for leaving you with so unceremonious a farewell yesterday morning. I can only plead, in extenuation of my discourtesy, the lateness of the hour, and the immutability of the leaving-time of trains! As it was, I was in my chair scarcely five seconds before the train started."

Katherine's lip curled. His train, indeed! A weighty excuse!

The letter continued:

"I am aware that you feel somewhat harshly toward me, and I can only admit that you are entirely justified. Hai ragione! My views of love and of marriage, which you know, are the views of a Liberated Future—a Future which shall dare to face the facts of things, and shall perhaps extract some good from them which the shams we clutch do not possess—but they are not the views of the Conventional Present.

"In forgetting for a moment (*but such a moment!*) that your welfare is bound up in your maintaining yourself in good standing with the Conventional Present, I have indeed sinned. Mea culpa! I can only stake my claim for forgiveness on your knowledge of how great was the temptation, and how sweet the sin!

"You can readily perceive, however, that our impulses have led us to enter upon a course of action which could end only in disaster for you. Your own instincts must tell you that for us to remain longer under the same roof, *with no matter what* good resolutions, is to court that disaster. We could not keep those resolutions. You know it. There must, for us, be no *encora*. It is in the second misstep that danger lies!

"Two courses, then, alone are open to me: to marry you, or to let you forget me.

"I choose the second; for, believe me, dear girl,—though I know you will not—it would be far from a kindness to you for me to marry you. A year, two years—perhaps less—the red flare of passion might endure; then—what? A lifetime of miseries for you; of exasperations for me.

"I am brutally frank—yes! But you are not the girl to shrink from facts! Stern medicine, but best, in the long run, to cure us both of our malady!

"Addio! You look upon me now as a bad friend;

perhaps the time will come when you may realize I was, in some sort, a good one.

“ *Sempre il tuo fedele,*

“ *P.*”

The first effect of this remarkable document was to make Katherine burn all over, as if she had received a slap in the face. Paolo's open assumption that she cared so much for him when he cared so little for her ——! And yet, had he not a right to assume that she cared very greatly indeed? Was there indeed any other decent interpretation of her actions?

She read the letter through again; and, in spite of herself, she thrilled to it. With a little ink, a few pen-strokes, Paolo had rewoven his dignity, his desirability, about him.

It was true, all that he said. (But it needed a courageous mind, writing to one that he knew to be as courageous as his own, to dare such frankness!) She knew his splendid, liberating theories of freedom of relation between men and women; but, with equal clearness, she knew who, if she and he attempted to live up to those theories, would pay; and, with an uncompromisingly correct estimate of herself, she knew she was unable to pay the price. She was not one of those romantic souls who “count the world well lost for love.” Though she had always thought herself reckless, she found herself, at the pinch, too canny. She doubted his inability to make as much of a success of marriage as the average man. She suspected it was rather a case of would not, than could not. Still,

there was no doubt that he believed himself to be sincere —— She gave him credit for that belief.

A selfish man might have stayed; might have played weakly with good resolutions that he knew were foredoomed to failure; might have gratified his own desire at whatever cost of disaster to her.

Not so Paolo! He had risen above self! He had courageously faced the facts—forced her to face them with him—had renounced, for herself and him, the transient pleasure of the moment that he might better guard her ultimate welfare than she was yet prepared to guard it for herself!

His mother's dictum had but coincided with his own decision. That was why he had yielded to it. . . .

And how his renunciation had elevated their hitherto rather questionable relation! This was friendship! And what a fine friendship it was—how frank—how scornful of subterfuge—how presumptive of an equality between him and her that would make her scorn to use the unfair prerogative with which society has striven to balance the unfair disadvantages accruing to her sex. She read the letter again, thrilling again. Davis Vaughn? He had faded below the horizon. She began planning a reply to Paolo—a reply that should show him he had not misjudged her—a reply that should open the way for friendship—at a safe distance. . . .

(4)

Paolo's letter ended at the bottom of a sheet. She did not see till she refolded it that the letter really had

been reopened, and that there was a postscript hastily scrawled on the back, and blurred as if, after writing it, the writer had hurriedly thrust the sheet back into the envelope.

With a ghastly premonition of its purport, she read it:

"I am not sailing for a week yet. Possibly you may be in New York sometime before then ——?"

Katherine gave a loud, loud laugh.

"What are you laughing at, Katherine?" called Angela, from the next room, somewhat irritably, for her nerves were not yet settled after the events of the two days preceding.

"I am laughing," cried Katherine joyously, "at the fatal tendency of human nature to write postscripts!"

She glanced at her wrist-watch. It was a quarter to nine. She jumped up and slipped into a rose-colored sweater and a rakish little toque that suited her well. She rejoined Angela.

"Where are you going?" demanded the young lady.

"Out for a constitutional," replied Katherine calmly.

"To meet Davis Vaughn?" inquired Angela, suspiciously. Had not Davis said, the night before, that, in his devotion to fresh air and exercise, he passed there every morning on his way to his father's office, a little before nine?

"Possibly," replied Katherine.

"Who was your letter from?" asked Angela, exhuming the dead and buried subject, with startling effect. "Paolo?"

She looked at her friend with a slight smile.

"Why do you ask that?" replied Katherine, somewhat taken aback.

"Because it's just the sort of thing that Paolo would do," replied Angela, complacently. "You'll be a great fool, my dear, if you pay any attention to anything he says. Paolo," she pursed her lips, "is a *very fine talker*."

"My dear Angy," retorted Katherine, though she reddened, "do you think I don't know about how much truth there is in anything that anyone says?"

She stuck her hands in the pockets of the rose-colored sweater, whistled a meditative tune, looked out of a bay-window, and saw a tall, sandy-complexioned young man in immaculate morning costume, approaching, down Beacon Street. She regarded him thoughtfully for a few moments, smiled, sauntered down-stairs, opened the front door, reflected a moment, and then descended to the sidewalk, turned up the street, and, a few seconds later, met the young man face to face.

(5)

No one who witnessed Katherine's greeting to Davis, that morning, would have supposed she despised the traditional wiles and guiles of her sex. Her good-morning had an air a little surprised, a little pleased, a trifle intimate.

"How sorry I am for you, Mr. Vaughn!" she continued, brightly.

"Why?" He came, galvanically, to a stop. Did she know ——? Did his face show ——?

"Having to go to work on a morning like this!" She was personified Innocence. He breathed again. She did not suspect ——

And meanwhile, at her direction, he peered between brick houses, down areas, at a narrow vista containing a transverse section of empty Esplanade and gleaming, foam-flecked river.

"That's where I'm bound for!" announced the innocent girl.

Davis hesitated; looked at his watch.

"I'm a little early," he muttered.

She taunted him with her own freedom and his lack of it. "No, no! You can't go with me! You might be late to your office—and then what would happen?"

What would happen?

Nothing.

Nothing at all. Davis, already Junior Partner (such was his conscientious industry and natural aptitude for business) in the Vaughn Lumber Company, was his own master.

Yet he hesitated.

In all his well-ordered business career, which had begun some ten years before, when, at the age of seventeen, he was graduated from Stone's,—in all these ten conscientious years, Davis had never, by the fraction of a minute, been late to his desk. No! Such a record could not be lightly ——

At the psychological instant, Katherine, watching

him with concealed intensity, laughed; and her laugh was like the light flick of a whip-lash.

Davis flushed.

"I guess I'm my own master!" he announced hastily. "Let's try the Esplanade!"

It was a walk!

Never had a girl treated Davis as Katherine did. The sixteen nice girls in Boston and New York were all polite and gentle of speech. Katherine tormented him with impertinences, teased him, and then soothed him with a kindness of such a quality as intoxicated him and left him thirsting for more impertinences that there might be more kindness.

One moment he was in the depths of despond, certain that this radiant girl had no use for him; the next instant he had sprung to the seventh heaven on the wings of a hope that they might, after all, be friends.

She showed him (pushing back her sleeve) where the manacle had pinched her wrist, the night before, in being fastened. His arm, as hers lay, for a moment, lightly (and innocently) across it, quivered.

None of the sixteen nice girls would have done that, and he knew it. She was flirting with him outrageously. (Or was she?)

At any rate, flirting or not, he liked it! He liked it, and he didn't care! He supposed this was what girls referred to as "vamping"; but he didn't care. He didn't care—*what*. It was what he had been secretly wanting for the last ten of his twenty-seven years; but he had always been too carefully protected by his Family and the Sixteen, from any young woman who

could have had the effect on him that Katherine was having now. . . .

His family were going abroad to-morrow . . . for three months. . . .

Suddenly Katherine stopped short.

"My goodness!" she cried. "I don't dare look at my watch! You can't come one single step farther with me! You've come too far already!"

He knew he had; but he rebelled a little, for she was making him leave her just when he wanted most to stay; and she was evasive as to when he could see her again. . . .

The stenographers in the outer office stared as Davis, poorly feigning unconcern, stalked through their midst—an hour and a half late.

At his desk, in the privacy of his own office, head in hands, Davis sat and thought.

What had she done to him—this Miss Howard? How had she suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, come to be to him what she was? Only a week, two weeks, ago, he had seen her, and she might have been anybody. He hadn't even thought her good-looking. And now ——!

What had she done to him?

And with what disorganizing effect had she invaded his orderly existence! Last night she had made him forget entirely the conventional limits of a social call. A miracle! This morning she had made him late—*late*—to work. A greater miracle.

Half-terrified, he looked ahead down a long vista, filled with more and more, greater and greater

miracles. And all of them, he foresaw, disrupting, annihilating his orderliness.

He did not care. He hated orderliness. . . .

(6)

In due season their engagement was announced. A number of people were flatteringly startled, and, after the first breathlessness, Katherine was pleased with herself. It was pleasant to be told by Bettina and Hattie and the other girls that she had made the catch of the year. Davis II was rich, very rich indeed, even in his own right (in case his family, who were still abroad, should disinherit him when they heard the news); and while, being of a general sandy complexion and small top-head, he was not, for looks, precisely what Katherine might have desired in an ideal husband, still he had good height and an excellent physique; he was always faultlessly groomed, and had a distinguished carriage which marked him in a crowd.

The date of their marriage was set for the following autumn. Katherine would not be hurried.

That, said Marie, was a mistake. Katherine would better take him while she could get him.

Katherine heard what Marie had said. She smiled.

CHAPTER VIII

HYGIENE AND HOT AIR

(I)

DAVIS's family were traveling in Norway when the cabled news of his engagement overtook them. Davis's father, stricken, cabled a diplomatic reply:

"Don't announce engagement till we arrive. Coming next steamer."

And back they came: Davis Standish I, Mrs. Vaughn, Davis's married sister and her husband, maids, couriers, and baggage. In such force assembled, they were confident of their ability to make Davis realize, by the sheer impact of their irreproachability, the unsuitability of Katherine as a prospective member of the Family.

Not that they knew anything against Katherine. They did not, indeed, know her at all, even by sight. They only knew that she was the offspring of Richard Howard, a scapegrace whose personal indulgences, it was whispered, were beginning to tell, ever so slightly, on his business efficiency; and Mrs. Vaughn remembered vividly Belle Ansella, that perplexing adventuress, by whom she had once been worsted in a lively encounter. It was enough. The heiress of so dubious a heritage could not possibly be a suitable candidate for admittance into the family.

Besides, Katherine had, underhandedly, and contrary to all the proprieties by which the Vaughns lived and moved and had their being, ensnared Davis during the absence of his natural protectors. She had not given them an opportunity to look up her antecedents and investigate her personal desirability before accepting him. It was a practical confession of undesirability. Back they came.

But Katherine was ready for them. The innocent girl was prepared: an outfit of demure frocks; an outfit of demure manners. The frocks and the manners—an insinuating pathos, based on motherlessness, toward Mrs. Vaughn; and a pathetic eagerness to “learn” of that lady—these, reinforced by a queer, alarming doggedness on the part of Davis, turned the trick. The engagement was announced, and it was understood to have the sanction of the Vaughns.

For most people that was sufficient. It was amazing what personages, hitherto unaware of the existence of Katherine Howard, hastened, on the strength of her engagement to Davis Vaughn, to extend her social credit. She was invited about; people—particularly the socially ambitious—gave little luncheons and big teas and dinner-dances for her and Davis. It was, for Katherine, quite like a *début*—the *début* she had never had.

Still, there was another side of it. The Vaughns might possibly be resigned: they could not possibly be pleased. Davis might make one of any number of marriages in their own set, the least brilliant of which would be as much brighter than this *mésalliance* as an

arc-light is brighter, and more wholesome, than phosphorescence. And perhaps they were not even resigned: perhaps they were playing a waiting game. There were plenty of people—pinch-nostriled inhabitants of lower Beacon Street—who continued frigidly to ignore the social existence of Richard Howard's daughter; and who, when the topic of Davis Vaughn's engagement was broached, changed the subject.

It began to be generally understood in fact, by and by, that there was something a trifle dubious about the engagement. There were people who dared speak of it as an entanglement. It was rumored that Mrs. Vaughn had criticized, in confidence, Katherine's "attitude as an engaged girl"; and had added that poor Davis seemed blindly infatuated.

Katherine's attitude as an engaged girl was certainly peculiar. It was obvious to almost anybody that she avoided tête-à-têtes with her fiancé. It was the way, Marie said, that she held him. It was the way, Katherine said herself, that she kept herself from being bored to extinction.

As summer came on, however, she was forced to see more and more of him, and the chain of his dullness galled her. She became restive under it. She began to wonder how much, perhaps, at the very least, she would have to see of him after their marriage. Her former flippant theories of a husband's insignificance as a "mere detail in one's environment" paled before the face of a fiancé's alarming significance. Davis II's dullness loomed a monstrous thing. She was appalled at its enormity and at his complacent ignorance of its

existence. She knew beforehand exactly what he was going to say, every time he opened his mouth. Frequently he said the same thing twice after an interval of days or weeks, and the iteration fretted her ear like the maddening tick of a clock in the night. His thoughts ran in a few neat grooves; how intimately she knew them! Hygiene, motor-boats, golf, lumber! There they were, labeled.

He had, to be sure, his good points. He was chivalrous, gentle, sentimental. If he frequently censored (gently) Katherine's conversation, and suggested modification in her clothes, habits, and friends (he banned Baldie entirely), on the other hand he defended her with the most touching inconsistency from criticism on the same points by his family.

"Katherine has poor Davis wound around her little finger," lamented Davis's married sister.

But it was not so; and nobody knew that better than Katherine herself. She often longed for a clash of wills; in a clash she would have come out better. But there was never a clash. Her will merely thudded, like steel on *lignum-vitæ*, against a solid, immovable, impregnable, inert obstacle: Davis's obstinacy. There was no reasoning with it, no appealing from it, no conquering it.

(2)

The time approached when she must spend hours standing for fittings if she wished her trousseau to materialize; when the bridesmaids must promise faithfully not to desert the bride, and must let their gowns

be dictated; when the day and hour of the wedding must be decided, and the invitations ordered. It was a trying time for Katherine. She chafed under its demands, and began audibly to wish that she could be married without a wedding. She lost some of her good color. She began to have headaches. "Liver," said Davis anxiously, and prescribed rhubarb salts. Katherine finally agreed to see a doctor.

Two days later she had a headache again.

"You ought to drink a good cereal coffee," said Davis, seriously. "Really I used to have headaches myself, but since I began Postum I haven't been troubled once. It's the coffee that's causing these headaches of yours. There's such a thing, you know, as 'coffee heart'; recognized by physicians. It begins with headache, bad color, flutterings of the heart, sinking sensations, faintness, dizziness, and may prove fatal. Did you know that by actual statistics, coffee kills more people annually than alcohol does?"

"Really?" replied Katherine, with an effort. She had a very bad headache.

"Yes, it's an actual fact. You know my physical condition is a little hobby of mine. I have come to the conclusion that there's no excuse for a person's being 'run down.'" He looked at Katherine argumentatively.

"No?" said Katherine, with a second effort.

"No. Not if he sleeps well, exercises well, and eats the right things. Now I take what I call a common-sense breakfast:" (Katherine knew the menu by heart) "some fresh fruit or a baked apple, two

shredded wheat biscuits with hot milk, three soft-boiled eggs, zwieback and Postum. If you'd do it, sweetheart ——"

Katherine shivered. A vision of her lazy late breakfast-in-bed flashed before her mind in vivid contrast to the picture of Davis, methodical, regular in his habits, seated at his seven o'clock meal, prosaically consuming enormous quantities of eggs, cereal, and Postum: a vision of a dainty inlaid tray, the thinnest of purple-and-gold coffee-cups smoking-full of a delicious poisonous beverage, golden-brown (and indigestible) with cream, a delicate plate of crisped triangles of buttered toast, a golden glowing spoonful of marmalade, and a great yellow rose lying across the snowy napkin. "Yes?" she said.

"But I will teach you—later ——" Davis's eyes were colorless, deep-set under sandy, bushy brows; one remembered the look, without being able to recollect the eyes; the look, as it rested now on Katherine, was infinitely tender. He was thinking, she knew, of a seven o'clock breakfast table, set with double quantities of eggs and shredded wheat and baked apples, where punctually, the cereal coffee should be poured by the capable adorable hands of her: his dutiful wife. Poor Davis! How he was going to be cheated! She closed her eyes. She felt very tired—and loathsome.

He was anxious in a moment.

No, it was only that her head ached.

Had it kept her awake at night?

No.

"But you look as if you had not had enough sleep."

"I did not go to bed very early."

He shook his head at her. His look contained gentle, anxious reproof. She could not bear it any longer. She rose hastily and excused herself. He excused her; certainly. She must lie down and take a nap. She was gone so quickly that he had not time for a kiss even of her brown nervous hands. His look, as he turned away and went out, was downward bent: a hungry, dumb, voiceless look.

(3)

He worried about Katherine's headaches.

"Why are you always tired, lately?" he asked anxiously. "It isn't a good sign. You haven't been smoking again, have you, dearest? There must be something wrong underneath. I wanted to talk over the question of your allowance; but if you are tired ——"

"There is always so much to talk over," said Katherine.

(4)

It was worst of all when they discussed their future home-making. Davis's father wished him (and Davis's own wish was one with his father's) to establish a family estate. It was his idea to purchase some six or seven hundred acres in the country outside of Boston—perhaps out toward Monroe's and Billerica—lay out a portion of it in lawns and drives, put in an artificial lake and build a handsome residence upon its

border; then to live there and improve the rest of the land at his leisure.

Katherine objected strenuously to this plan.

In the first place it would put her beyond reach of her acquaintances; and even open hospitality cannot take place of the afternoon cup of tea casually shared with the chance caller. Especially in winter when their country estate should be snowed under, with her and Davis left to their own devices winter evening after winter evening till they should be thawed and ploughed out again to renewed intercourse with society!

In the second place it would take them out of town, and, Katherine said, she lived on the whirl and excitement of city life: the actual clanging of tram-car bells and motor trucks, and the shouting of teamsters.

The result of all this disagreement was the postponement of their wedding from that autumn to the following spring.

"Oh, we'll never get along together," Katherine remarked to Angela, whose engagement to Harold Fifield had just been announced. "We disagree on everything. This morning we quarreled again. That is, not quarreled, but we had a discussion."

Angela tightened the linen in her embroidery hoop. She was paying an afternoon call upon Katherine and had industriously brought some work along. "What was the matter this morning?" she asked.

"Our rooms. He wants us"—Katherine sniffed—"to use the same—the same bedroom!"

"Well, why not?" inquired Angela. "You're going to marry him, aren't you?"

"But heavens, Angy," protested Katherine with heat, "it isn't as if he were poor and couldn't afford a double suite. He wants it so because he wants to be with me all the time!"

Angela cast a disapproving glance up at her friend. "Does that seem so unnatural to you, Katherine?" she asked, with raised brows. "Because if it does, I don't think you'd better marry him."

"And I hurt his feelings," continued Katherine ruefully. "But Angela, I should stifle! I must have some place where I can get away and be by myself. I should go mad, I tell you."

Angela bent over her work. "Do you love him, Katherine?" she asked, inquisitively.

Katherine twitched her body impatiently. "I don't believe in love," she replied scornfully.

Angela stuck her needle in the linen, laid down her hoop and looked up at Katherine.

"Then, Katherine," she said righteously, "I don't know how you dare marry Davis; for he believes in love. And Katherine, it is one thing to throw your arms around your husband's neck and kiss him because you love him dearly and are crazy about him—crazy about him, Katherine—and another thing to do it because it is your wifely duty. . . . And Davis is not the man to go his way and let his wife go hers."

Katherine shivered, for she suspected that Angela was right.

(5)

It remained, however, for an unforeseen event to bring her sense of Davis's obstinate claims to a head, and to sharpen past endurance her impatience of his right to be considered in all her decisions: she received a letter from Paolo in Italy.

He reminded her that she had promised to let him interpret to her, sometime, his beloved Napoli. The promise, he pointed out, was as yet unredeemed. The winter was before them; would she not remember her promise more fruitfully? He recalled to her mind (as if she were likely to forget them!) certain episodes of their friendship which were, perhaps, better forgotten but sweet to remember. That was all. There was no mention of her engagement, though he certainly knew she was engaged. He seemed to ignore it as completely as if it were only a fiction.

Katherine laughed, and tossed the letter aside. It did not need an answer. Its impudence exempted her from the necessity of replying. It took her a little too much for granted! Did he think her engagement so light a thing?

She reread the letter.

Now it seemed to her that she detected the unwritten writing between the lines. It was almost as if Paolo knew what was going on in her secret soul; it was almost as if his silence about her engagement said, "I know you better than you know yourself, Katherine. Davis is no husband for you. You will never marry him. His love ties you by the feet. You know

and I know that you are already tearing and breaking and struggling your way free from it. I need say nothing. I do not pose as your liberator; you do not need a liberator; the law of your own nature is liberator enough. I regard it as a fact accomplished (your liberty of action), therefore I do not refer to the mockery of your being in bonds—bound by the feet. (You, the fleet-footed, bound by the feet!) . . . I have something better to talk of: Italy.”

And what of his own attitude? That, too, was defined by what he had not said. That, too, started into legibility between the written lines. “I recognize your immortal right to freedom; that right which you are trying to bargain away to Davis and cannot. By that token, you are safe with me—I shall not catch you and tie you. Come and look at Italy with me; and go—as free as when you came!”

Though possibly a little contradictory of the former letter she had had from Paolo, was it, after all, really presumptuous? Had he not seen her truly—more truly than she had seen herself? Had she not, truly, tried to bargain herself into captivity and repented? Was she not, truly, bound by the feet and struggling to get free? Was his letter, after all, so egotistical? Was he not offering her Italy, rather than himself? Once it had chagrined her because Paolo had not wanted to marry her: now she was grateful for the fact.

Davis had alarmed her about marriage, the conventional marriage, the institution that Paolo, more courageous than she, dared not only to disbelieve in

but also to renounce. The thought of Davis stifled her, like being shut in a room whose doors were never to be opened. The thought of Paolo, by contrast, seemed large and open—like having the run of the woods and fells.

She read the letter again. "Did she remember——?" Did she remember! She caught the letter to her bosom, pressed hard against her under her open palms. But she remembered also—— She snatched it out and tore it fiercely into fragments, divided and sub-divided. After all, why was he writing to her now? Was "Bice" playing off, and did he want to show Bice that he had only to beckon and he could bring a girl all the way from America to be made a fool of? . . . A girl he had jilted, too? . . . No, assuredly that was a trifle too insolent! She scattered the fragments of his letter into her wastepaper basket.

But she could not so easily scatter the memories. They made her restless. She took out her car and tried to ride the restlessness off, but it rode with her, goading her to speed beyond speed, in vain; till at last she gave up and turned homeward.

At the Boylston Street transfer-station she was caught in a block. It was the last straw. To stop seemed to admit defeat. No blockade could—should—thwart her, in such a mood! There was a little space ahead yet: she insinuated her car into it, trusting the block to break up before she need stop.

The space was too narrow, and she went too far, and before she knew it she was scraping the mud-

guard of the car on her right. Its driver turned irascibly on her. "Hey! What's the big idea?"

It was her father.

For years, ever since the episode in Montescue's drawing-room, Katherine had dreaded sometime meeting him: the inevitable chance meeting which was bound, sometime, to take place. And now it had come. She was caught in the block, almost elbow to elbow with him; a car wedged in behind her, its fender against her rear lights, made a withdrawal, even of inches, impossible to attempt.

She stared at Dickie, and Dickie, aware of having used an offensive tone to a lady, but too sullen to apologize, glowered at her. He did not recognize her! The blessed fact dawned slowly on her. Their previous meeting had been years ago; she had changed in looks since then; he had only seen her once; never with a hat: and a hat makes all the difference.

He, too, had changed. It was evident, even to a superficial scrutiny, that his liver was playing smash with him; also that his nerves were gone. The futile, jerky honking of his horn showed the latter; also the irascible scowl, and the twitching of a little muscle in one cheek.

Dickie had a significant companion with him, too: a young person with diamonds in her ear-lobes. Hitherto, Dickie had kept business and pleasure strictly separate: each strictly confined to its appropriate division of the day. Now it appeared (it was just three by Lloyd's clock) that pleasure was at last, in the form of the young person with the ear-rings, encroach-

ing on business-hours. There was every indication that Dickie was over-speeding and that, though he had got by with it a couple of decades, the grim traffic officer on Life's thoroughfare was holding the stopwatch on him now.

The sentimental impulse to cut out his parties, clean his house, and take his "little girl" home with him to keep it clean, had been but the moment of last suspense in a tragedy which was now moving swiftly to the catastrophe.

Katherine's sombre gaze upon him appeared to have a telepathic effect on him, for at last he turned and encountered it. At the same instant, some level quality of her look—familiar, never-to-be-forgotten—arrested his own gaze, made him look again, stare (while the hot color crept up Katherine's cheek), and recognize her.

"Oh, hello!" he said.

Katherine, confused, opened her lips without replying.

He looked again.

"Not living in the country, then?"

Katherine reddened furiously. It was unjust! Unfair! Still—how refute by words the charge that actions had acquiesced in? He had thought her mercenary. Well, had she not, all these years, taken his money? Money tossed her half-contemptuously. . . .

The traffic officer had released the block. Horns were honking, engines were volleying. In a moment it would be too late. . . . Katherine felt suddenly sick of it all; sick of everything in her present life;

longed for realities; had a queer impulse to arrest her father's progress, to insist on explaining that she wanted to stop being sordid, to make the absurd appeal that they should be truly father and daughter. . . .

The moment was past. Dickie honked his horn, started his engine, glanced over his shoulder at her with an enigmatical smile: "Well—make hay while the sun shines, my dear!" he said; and, with a dexterous turn of the wheel, he shot into the opening ahead of her, out to the left of the vehicles spreading out in the cleared road, and vanished.

Katherine started her car slowly. She had a sense of irrevocable loss: as if this had been the last chance —

"How bad he looked!" she caught herself thinking. "Bad —and he can't be much over fifty."

A phrase they use occurred to her: "Breaking up." Dickie was breaking up.

His cryptic parting utterance recurred to her. "Make hay while the sun shines!"

What had he meant?

With what light she had on his private character, she supposed he meant, cynically: "Have a good time while you can enjoy it. Soon you will be fifty, like me, and 'breaking up'!"

Strange advice from a father to a daughter!

And yet, was he not a strange father of a strange daughter?

"Make hay while the sun shines!" . . .

Suddenly her life, dominated and bounded by Davis, seemed intolerably dull, and gray. . . .

And somewhere (but irrevocably beyond the horizons of a life dominated and bounded by Davis) lay sunlit lands—adventure—wide airs.

(6)

The breaking of the engagement was a great relief to Davis's friends and family. Malicious persons, especially those with marriageable daughters, hinted that Davis was also relieved. It was more than hinted that he was the one who had broken it off. Everybody had known what it meant when the wedding was first postponed. If Katherine really wanted him, she should have landed him while she could. She should never have attempted an engagement. She should have made an elopement of it, at the very first,—while Davis's family were abroad. Probably Davis had been trying to let her down easily: he must have seen why she was marrying him; it was perfectly clear that it was not for love. He was to be congratulated on having got free so easily.

Davis, himself, was so non-committal as to seem to have relapsed into woodenness. He turned an impassive front to the congratulatory insinuations of his friends. Or rather, he turned an impassive back; for he had gone to Seattle on the Company's business; he was working sixteen hours a day, and seldom wrote more than a post-card. About a year later, he returned, and married one of the Sixteen. It was eminently an appropriate affair, and both families were very happy about it. . . .

Katherine's feelings, meanwhile, were (people said)

more obvious. Her access of incredible recklessness measured accurately, people said, the degree of her chagrin at losing Davis. She smoked incessantly. She was out in her car almost all day, usually alone. She was repeatedly arrested for over-speeding. She shrugged her shoulders, and paid her fines indifferently; perhaps even a trifle ostentatiously. She boasted that she dreaded only one thing: having her license taken away.

"And sometime," remonstrated Angela, one afternoon at a session in the Graysons' library, "you'll skid on a muddy road when you're going fifty miles an hour, and that will be the end of you!"

Baldie (verging, now, in spite of all his efforts, on the rank of Senior at Harvard University) was sitting by, on a low stool, twiddling a green felt hat between his stubby-fingered hands. Even Baldie looked serious. "Joy-riding" was all right, as nobody knew better than Baldie: and if you paid for a joy-ride with a broken neck, why, at least you had had your money's worth. But it seemed to him that Kat was taking the risk without the joy.

"Angy dear," retorted Katherine, "I should like nothing better!"

"I hate you in your 'Angy' mood," remarked Angela placidly.

Katherine laughed.

"And the sooner it happens the better pleased I shall be! Why not? What has life" (she spoke the word contemptuously) "for me? I'm bored all the time when I'm not in my car. I made seventy miles

the other night, on the Post Road. And it didn't seem any faster than forty used to. Soon there won't be a car made that can go fast enough to take me out of myself. Then I shall be perpetually bored. What a thought! But the difficult thing to do is really to set a date for one's own decease. Why to-day more appropriately than to-morrow? Why to-morrow more appropriately than a week from to-morrow? And so the time slips by; and one follows the line of least resistance, which is to let one's breathing and physical functioning go on. Anybody can live along; but it takes such an awfully definite act of will to accomplish one's decease! I don't wonder the majority of people just keep on living along without rhyme or reason.

"If we were artists, we wouldn't do that. We'd crush all the joy of living, the headiest wine of the grapes, into one mad cup to be drunk with songs and laughter in abandon. And then, at the first gray finger of a coming day of reckoning and disillusion, we should do as the Romans did: bare the artery to the lancet, and die beautifully."

"Hot air," said Baldie.

"No—poetry. A pagan poem," said Katherine, dreamily. She blew a thin, curling wisp of smoke up into the air, watching it through half-shut eyes.

"I don't see that there's anything very poetical about running over a stone wall and being squashed under one's machine," said Angela, practically.

"No, of course not," said Katherine. "That's what I am saying. Most of us follow the line of least

resistance. We are not made of the same stuff as the Romans. We let ourselves go on breathing until Chance cuts us off. And Chance is not an artist. . . . But it takes a lot of responsibility off lots of people's shoulders. . . . And then, after all, it has its compensations. I never speed down the dark country roads without the hope of a ditch or an un-railed bridge. I never race a train without the hope of an unexpected crossing. It's the way I get my excitement."

"Hot air!" reiterated Baldie, manfully, though he felt little crinkly chills all up his spine.

Angela continued her crocheting in silence. She was unimpressed to any great extent, any more, by Katherine's oratory. Harold said that Katherine would get over these queer ideas if you gave her time. Harold said that what Katherine needed was a bunch of children to look after. And Angela had great faith in Harold's opinion. Harold said that Katherine was spoiled, badly; and that what she needed was a husband who would bang her over the head with a stuffed club when she talked such nonsense.

(7)

The last of the following May, the pink-and-gray villa was ready to be closed, upon Katherine's departure, the following day, with Mrs. Jordane for New York. Their passage was booked from that city to Liverpool. Katherine was tired of automobiling; she wished to travel.

She had only a hazy idea of her itinerary. The main thing was to be going. Perhaps they would take the Italian trip—perhaps not. She had not written—anybody. She thought it would be rather fun to make a flying visit to Naples and its environs and later write to Paolo telling him that they had been and gone; so sorry that—et cetera. Nothing, however, was decided so far ahead as that.

The maids were paid off and discharged, the furniture was swathed in linen dust-covers, china and vases were packed away, the silver and most of Katherine's jewelry were in the vault at her bank, her steamer-trunk was packed and gone, draperies and window-curtains were down, shutters were closed, doors and windows were boarded up.

Early on the morning of their intended departure, Katherine and Mrs. Jordane were standing on the piazza, anxiously awaiting the arrival of a taxicab for which they had telephoned. The paper-boy came by, whistling merrily, and folding the paper in a hard wad, sent it hurtling through the air to the door-sill. Katherine called to him to tell him he would need to bring no more. She picked up the paper and opened it to look for the weather-forecast. On the front sheet she read in black head-lines: "Millionaire thought to have Drowned Self, crazed by Business Cares—'Dickie' Howard found Dead in Bath-Tub."

Katherine sat down suddenly on the piazza-edge, there being no chairs. She was conscious of a numbness, as from a physical shock.

Mrs. Jordane, peering over her shoulder at the page,

cried out, "Oh, my heavens!" The poor woman's first thought was: "This puts off our trip."

After a moment Katherine lifted the paper again and bent over the columns which described the tragedy. State Street, it seemed, would not be greatly surprised. It had been common talk, for some time, that Richard was "breaking up." He had been in bad health for a year. Recently he had had an operation, since which it had been observed that his nerves were gone to pieces. Katherine, remembering vividly her first sight, in the Montescue drawing-room, of her father, and her curious conception of him, *at* that time, as two distinct persons: the Dickie of the self-indulgent mouth and the Dickie of the fighting jaw, had now a chilling fancy that Dickie the good-fellow had at last betrayed Dickie the fighter into the hands of the Grim Enemy.

Katherine was mentioned as the sole surviving relative of the deceased; the ghastly coincidence of the suicide of both her parents was touched upon. This was the point that remained clear on her consciousness after all the rest had dropped away into a strange blur.

"It will only be a matter of time," she thought to herself. "I shall end as they have ended. Then there will be no more of us ——"

She went into the villa, and took off her wraps. Up-stairs she raised some shades and threw open a window and looked out. A gray day.

She got the novel from her traveling-bag which she had intended reading on the train, and sat down by

the open window and tried to read. But her mind was numb. Automatically—she lighted a cigarette.

Sometime later, a handsome limousine turned in at her driveway beneath the porte-cochère. A sedate gentleman, garbed in black, alighted from it, and, at a sedate gait, approached the villa. It was the lawyer, come to break to her the official news of her father's death.

(8)

Angela hurried to her friend as soon as she heard the news, and would have insisted on carrying Katherine home with her, but Katherine, stubbornly, would not go. The passages on the steamer were canceled; the idea of the trip postponed, pending the settlement of Richard Howard's estate.

Angela was wildly excited—an excitement which she felt it decorous to repress in Katherine's presence. It was rumored that there was no will; if that was the case, then Katherine would get everything. Kathy, her dear chum Kathy, a multi-millionairess! Angela could hardly realize it! How wonderful it was—just like a fairy-tale!

Katherine went taciturnly about the business of getting mourning suitable for the death of a father. Angela, who could not know the morbid idea which was obsessing her friend, was at first unable to explain to herself Katherine's deep and persistent depression over the loss of a father whom she had never known; till one day, by a flight of sentiment, she soared to the theory that it was the very

fact that Katherine had lost what she had never had, that made it so sad! After that she was more than ever tender with poor Kathy. . . . Yet sometimes she almost burst with the desire to ask Katherine if she had any idea of the exact extent of her father's wealth. . . .

In due season it transpired that there was no will: Angela hugged her friend ecstatically, in unselfish joy. She wondered how the heiress herself could be so apathetic, with millions almost within her grasp. She wondered, too, studying Katherine covertly now and then, whether it might be possible that there really had been something serious between Katherine and Paolo, and whether, perchance, Katherine might still care —

Happy day-dreams, these of dear Angela.

(9)

It took time to settle Mr. Howard's affairs, which were in a shocking tangle. Apparently Dickie had, of late, been giving more and more time to pleasures; less and less to business.

Katherine, leading a disheveled sort of existence alone with Mrs. Jordane in the villa, whose doors and down-stairs windows were still boarded up, awaited the outcome.

In due season it transpired that Dickie had died insolvent. Not only would there be no millions: the source of Katherine's allowance, even, had vanished.

This fact necessitated a considerable settling of her own affairs, in which Mr. Grayson kindly helped her, though he disapproved of her; for during the last two

years it had become increasingly evident to Katherine that ten thousand dollars a year is not anywhere near enough to live on. Consequently, she had got into the habit of running up mountains of bills, and, from time to time, dexterously applying her allowance at the points where it would do her the most good in extending her credit. There could be no more of that now. The mountain, in toto, must be dealt with.

In addition to this unpleasant fact there was another, no less so. Katherine's first car had been a modest enough purchase; the last one, a marvel of line and form and speed, had come from overseas. She had had to have it; the allowance would by no means buy it; therefore she had mortgaged the villa, free and clear till then. So she could not count on its bringing anything to help with the mountain. The mortgagee merely foreclosed on it, gave her notice of the date by which she must have vacated the premises, and that was the end of that little matter.

The private sale of her household furnishings and of her jewelry, however, very fortunately proved adequate to meet the demands of her creditors; and to pay off Mrs. Jordane, who, suffering a nervous collapse from acute disappointment, betook herself for a vacation to the house of a second cousin who was having difficulties with her domestic help. There was even a slight, inconsiderable remainder in cash. Angela went with her to Mr. Grayson's office to get the latter.

"I'm sorry it's not more, Katherine," Mr. Grayson said. He coughed pompously. "Have you any plans?"

Katherine said she had no plans.

"Of course, dear," said Angela, "you must stay with us till you are quite settled."

"Thanks," said Katherine. "I'll think about it, Angy. Maybe I will—I don't know."

She snapped her beaded bag shut upon the little bundle of bank-bills that Mr. Grayson had handed her.

"Of course you're coming home with me to supper, anyway," said Angela, as the friends descended the Subway stairs.

Katherine shook her head. "Not to-night."

"You're never going out to the villa, all alone!" cried Angela.

"Why not, baby-face?" laughed Katherine. "There are no ghosts there!"

"Well, you'll be over to-morrow for sure?" said Angela.

"Nothing is sure in this life, Angela," replied Katherine, mockingly.

(10)

Alone in the pink-and-gray villa, she reviewed all the closed, empty rooms with their drawn blinds and echoing floors. She had been wrong in saying there were no ghosts. The villa was full of ghosts. . . .

She descended by the stone steps to the street. There she paused and looked back, thoughtfully, up at the walled terraces and gray villa with its setting of poplar trees. She could scarcely see them. Nothing glimmered plain except a great white sign-board on the front lawn: "This House for Sale."

CHAPTER IX

A HOUSE FOR SALE

(I)

THE streets she traversed grew narrow. Fine residences gave place to small, cheap dwellings. Broad lawns dwarfed to unkempt plots of trodden soil. A reminiscent odor of beefsteak and fried onions hung about the dooryards. The sidewalk grew uneven and treacherous. Small dirty waifs trooped about the streets playing the evening games of squalid childhood. Misery and wretchedness sat on every step. They eyed her incuriously as she passed. She was not of their world. They were not interested in her.

Katherine was not at first conscious of directing her steps, but a magnetic image dwelt steadily before her inner vision, drawing her. It was the river.

She perceived, at last, what it was that was drawing her; and she acquiesced. There was no struggle. She saw, with a flash of clear sight, that this had been ordained for her, by flesh and nerves and moral fibre, from the beginning: that she should end her life wilfully. Wilful death, for her, was bred in the bone.

Besides, she was inexpressibly disgusted with life. She had made such a mess of it. She had chased pleasure and found ennui. She had chased love and found disillusion. She had chased marriage and so-

cial prestige and found nausea. She had chased Speed and come to the place where one must slow down or shoot off into space.

She was also sick, with an utter loathing, of herself. She was neither one thing nor another. She was neither good, nor consistently wicked. She was neither useful nor heartily frivolous. She had had her own way for twenty-three years, and her own way had mocked her. She had fought off and sneered at human affection, and yet now, down in the depths of her aching, empty heart, she found with disgust was one pang of regret—a passionate regret that in all her life there had been no one who really cared.

To merge with the silent tide flowing deep and dark beneath the bridge where she now stood, seemed the only desirable thing left for her. She had made too great a mess of life and herself. There could be no rectification. There could be none, if for no other reason, because she wanted none. Her lip curled: she was not a penitent: disgust was a strong, a virile thing; penitence was flabby, white-livered. There could be no rehabilitation for such as her. There could only be an end.

She stood leaning on the rail. Between her hands glimmered a crimson painted numeral—memento of some prankish collegian. The fancy crossed her brooding brain that when she passed out, she would not leave even so much of a mark as that upon life.

Beneath the bridge, the silent tide was flowing deep and dark. She wondered if drowned bodies sink or float. She fancied herself floating in the half-depths,

an inert thing at last, stirred by the shifting currents beneath the placid surface, among the purplish smoky hues of the marsh; past the quiet lights of the town. How silently and swiftly It would slip along beneath the splashes of murky light on the water. How awesomely God's dawn that she should never see would come up, over the silent river guarding her secret in its bosom.

She wondered how long it would be before they found that Thing; and whether It would sweep out to sea and never be found. Morgue or open sea, she was indifferent. It would all be over; she would have ceased caring about anything: long before that.

She began to take off her coat; she struggled with the billowy silk, compressing it into neat folds; she laid it down on the bridge. On it she laid her jet-and-steel bag. On that she laid her gloves, snapped together and neatly folded. She lifted her hat from her head—and realized, for the first time, what she was really preparing to do. She paused, holding the hat motionless in mid-air.

Before, she had been romancing; morbidly romancing.

Taking off her hat had shocked her rudely out of the romance. It had made the situation real. This self, this Katherine, the thing she had always lived with; or, this she, herself, behind which there was nothing—a few gulps of the black water down there, a few seconds of strangling and struggle, and then—no Katherine.

No Katherine! Conception impossible to grasp.

Because all the season of her consciousness this Katherine had been the pivot of a whole universe. Impossible to conceive all at once a pivotless universe. Possible imaginatively to annihilate space, substance; but not at once this self that imagines. It is a stupendous realization.

She set down the hat.

Now she was free; ready for the act. People were sometimes rescued. Sometimes they screamed, when they found themselves actually drowning; and the passer-by shouted for help and got them out. "None of that!" Katherine warned herself. "There's to be no screaming—and no swimming."

She looked about. The night was heavy with fog. No one could see far in it. She listened craftily. The distant whispers of Cambridgeport came to her ears: nothing nearer.

Her heart gave a great leap. This, then, was Death!

(2)

Life seems to take a satiric delight in anti-climax. The human heart salutes Death: and then discovers that Death is yet a great way off: and that in its profound emotion it is mocked.

Katherine approached the rail, which she must climb over, and from the outer plank of whose base she must hurl herself. She set one foot on the middle board, grasped the top of the railing, and prepared to swing the other foot over the top. As she willed to lift this second foot from the solid planking of the bridge, a frightful shudder shook her, and left her

otherwise motionless. Again she essayed the act, and again the same frightful shudder shook her, and she could not move her foot. Her body was like a thoroughbred horse, mad with terror of something ahead, to whom the whip is applied, and who will not jump sidewise nor back, but who dares not go on, and who only starts and trembles violently under the lash.

She stepped down onto the bridge and meditated upon the unexpected balk. She could not understand it. It was not fear of death, for she was not conscious of any fear. It could not be fear of the water nor of the plunge, for she was used to the water, and to striking it from heights fully as great as this must be: for the bridge was old and low. It was as if her body realized to what her will had consigned it: as if the great primal instinct warned it.

She considered what to do. She must manage it like a horse. She must blindfold it, and accustom it to the idea of moving forward step by step. She must cheat it. She said: "This is as if I were going into the water after dark for a swim—a thing I have often done. There will be nothing new or terrifying. I shall jump off, very much as if from a pier. My feet will strike the water and I shall shoot down into it. Then I must breathe in, at once."

Her nerve-paths took this down.

She repeated the formula. "Soon I shall be approaching the railing, I shall put one foot up and shall find myself on the outside, then I shall find myself in the water, and then I must breathe in."

She repeated this over in her mind several times, and then it came true. She was deep under water, and she had breathed in.

A frightful agony forced itself up into her head. Her mouth jerked open as if to grasp for air or give vent to a shriek of pain. She swallowed water. She struck out wildly to force herself up more swiftly to air. Air! Air!

Then suddenly something clear and separate in the very-core of her mind where the agony did not reach, said, "You are coming up too soon." At the same instant, in the dark, she saw Paolo's eyes, narrowed, amused. Her last sensation was of relaxing her arms, and of willing to breathe in.

(3)

Somewhere high up in the air over the Charles River below the old Allston Bridge was Katherine; and she was watching something in the water.

This something was a body and it was swimming with swift, purposeful strokes toward the bank. It swam with a powerful overhand stroke.

Katherine thrilled to the strength and machine-like regularity of the stroke. Its muscles must be made of steel. She watched it with enthusiasm. It made no sound: its force was purposefully spent. Stroke by stroke it was gaining against the current that opposed it. Plucky machine!

At intervals one arm went down to drag something—some clinging weight—from its knees; then the stroke changed for a moment; then was resumed.

Every time that this occurred, Katherine was afraid that the struggle was at an end, and watched anxiously to see the dark arm dart out which meant that strength and heart had not yet failed the swimming thing.

Sometimes the current dragged it back; sometimes it rushed it forward. Now she thought it would reach the bank; now she thought it had gone under; but then the arm shot out again, and the powerful steel snap of the stroke bore witness to the splendid equipment of the machine. She thrilled with pride—for this thing had been her body!

And then, suddenly, the terrible race was over. She knew it instantly by the sudden relaxing of that fighting-stroke. The swimming body was out of the current. A long, quiet stretch of slow-moving water lay between the little dark ball which was its head, and the line of darkness which was the bank. The ball revolved in the water and slid quietly along, leaving a faint, even ripple. The body was swimming on its side, with the scissors stroke. Katherine knew that stroke well. She knew that that body could swim forever with that stroke. Most amazing feelings swelled in her as she watched, and realized that the fight was won. Pride and ecstatic applause and an amazing affection. How plucky it was—how loyal to her—that body! She felt an extraordinary uprush of joy, and warmth.

Then everything blurred. . . .

She was lying over the wrecked cross-piece of an old boat-landing on the marsh's edge. Her face was resting in marsh mud. Her shoulders and head were

lower than her hips. She hung stranded across the rotten timber. Her limbs sagged, supine. The thin edge of the river, like a tongue, lapped her feet.

She was deathly sick: that was the sum-total of her consciousness: this intolerable sickness. Yet it was a beneficent sickness: it wracked the river-water out of her. The evil smell of the marsh under her face helped; the position of her body helped; it emptied her. Nausea was succeeded by a lethargy and an indifference; her eyes were closed.

But the ooze in which her cheek rested bothered her. It would not let her slip away to sleep. It crawled on her with her breathing; it stank. She dragged a hand up to wipe it off; she could not wipe it off; it troubled her; it destroyed her lethargy and her indifference.

Gradually she realized that she was lying in it. She began to struggle up. Her hands sank over the wrists in the fetid abomination. But by grasping the timber, she got herself erect. She felt herself horribly sick again, but she would not give way to it, since to become sick meant to fall again into the noisomeness from which she had escaped.

She lifted one foot and set it down ahead of her. It sank with a sucking and gurgling sound into the black ooze. She experienced a sudden terror of sinking into it and strangling. . . .

She fought off the panic. She forced herself to take another step—and another. She forced herself to go on, step by step. Sometimes it seemed as if she could not go on. . . .

Yet she went on. . . .

Endlessly, it seemed. . . .

Suddenly a dark obstruction loomed before her. It offered foothold. She climbed upon it, out of the dragging, quaking horror. She kept on climbing. She found herself free.

Fear of the place where she had been, drove her forward some little way on a staggering run; then, with a gasp, she grasped at whatever might be solid within reach, and fell. . . .

Slowly her mind resumed its functions. She was on her knees, lying against and clinging to a wooden structure of some sort. She drew herself back. Just opposite her eyes glimmered a crimson painted numeral—memento of some prankish collegian.

She stared at it. It looked vaguely familiar. She had seen it somewhere. Where?

She remembered.

She rose to her feet. She was standing on the old Allston Bridge in precisely the same spot where she had stood two hours before and saluted Death.

She perceived the anti-climax.

Nothing had been altered by her much-agonized-over action of two hours before, except that about a hundred and fifty dollars' worth of excellent clothes had been ruined.

CHAPTER X

DISPOSING OF OLD CLOTHES

(1)

KATHERINE, convalescent from an attack of pneumonia, lay in a neat, little white-enameled bed in a neat little sanitary room, and stared across sombrely at a rectangle of green elm-boughs and blue sky framed by a window-casement which was unsoftened by any unhygienic drapery.

She was remembering Paolo Grayson's amused, kindly eyes, and how he had said, indulgently: "You'd jump heroically, and the water would get all in your eyes and ears and nose, and then someone would come along and pull you out, and you'd be *so* wet and drippy—and feel so small!"

Wasn't this just about what had happened? She had posed as about to play the ancient Roman and make herself the arbiter of her own destiny; to rid the world and herself of that useless, disagreeable individual, Katherine Howard. And actually she had merely succeeded in spoiling some good clothes, and in making herself a nuisance to everybody.

She turned her hot face to the wall—the white, leering wall.

She had set the key-note for tragedy, and farce had been enacted.

She was glad that Paolo would never know—she was glad nobody would ever know (for she had kept it to herself)—what she had tried to do and how she had failed. To her tortured self-consciousness, the figure of herself, wading, in silk stockings and fine pumps, through mud and slime, to get back to the life she had so grandiloquently renounced, was a grotesque and humiliating spectacle. She burned to think how the sight of it would entertain Paolo.

Rat-tat-tat! The door opened, and Dr. Abrams entered the room, followed by the head nurse in charge of his hospital.

“Well, brooding again!” This was the doctor’s greeting, uttered in a non-committal tone.

Katherine flushed. She hated Dr. Abrams. She hated him because he seemed entirely too unimpressed with the importance of Katherine Howard. At the same time, she could not help but admire him. The doctor was a Hebrew of a fine type, middle-aged, somewhat inclined to intellectual overdevelopment, possessed of a certain dry sympathy; but scarcely sympathetic enough to counterbalance the coldness of the diabolically clear eye he turned on people. His patients were usually afraid of him—often resented his brusquerie; but they always sent poste-haste to him when they were sick. He was an eminently successful man, both professionally and financially. He was scrupulous in his charities, having given more than the tenth of his income every year since the very first year he had begun his practice. He had few charity patients, preferring, like the majority of his race, to

make money and then disburse it generously, rather than to forego making it.

Katherine had never encountered anybody so forceful, so keen, so cold. His force was the incisive, cutting force of the knife; not the clumsy, smashing force of the bludgeon. Katherine was powerless to combat it. The spoiled super-girl had at last met someone who was more than her match. Therefore, she hated him; and admired him.

He stood by the foot of her bed now, eyeing her with the reflective, emotionless gaze which she resented.

"How do you expect to get well if you behave this way?" he inquired, after a few moments.

Katherine turned her head away. "I don't care if I don't get well," she said, in a muffled tone, raging secretly at the childish sound of her own speech.

"That's perfectly evident," replied the doctor, drily.

She looked at him wrathfully, but speechless.

"Of course I don't mind having you occupy this room as long as you need it, my dear young lady," continued the doctor, in his cool, exasperating voice, "but the fact is that I have a patient who is waiting ——"

Her face flamed. "By all means, then, let your patient have the room!"

"My dear young lady," interrupted the doctor, without haste, "it serves no end whatever to talk like that. As a mere matter of professionalism, you will not be discharged from my hospital until you are entirely well."

There was a considerable pause. The head nurse, her immobile gaze fixed upon the doctor's face, at the mere flicker of an eyelid of his in her direction, slipped unobtrusively out of the open door. People even as wilful as this obstinate Miss Howard have been known to eat humble-pie, but seldom before witnesses.

"Very well," said Katherine, stiffly, some moments after the nurse's retirement, "you have me, I guess. What do you want me to do?"

"*I want ——?*" repeated the doctor, with a faintly interrogatory emphasis.

Katherine flushed again. "What must I do to free the room as soon as possible?"

The doctor looked at her thoughtfully for several minutes. "Well, for one thing," he said slowly, at last, "you might take your medicines without kicking up a childish row every time."

"Very well," said Katherine, reddening.

"Then you might try to coöperate mentally with us. That would go a long way."

"I don't see," objected Katherine, sullenly, "why you try to save me alive. If you knew what a miserable fizzle as a human being I am ——"

"A doctor doesn't have a patient under observation for three weeks, as I have had you," interrupted the doctor, amiably, "without learning considerable about her."

"Well—I'm a fizzle."

"It certainly looks so."

"Well, then ——"

"Well, then what?"

"Well, then," said Katherine, rather uncertainly, "why do you try to save me?"

"A matter of professionalism, Miss Howard. We never let a patient die whom we can save. No matter how worthless."

Katherine looked suspiciously at him to see if he was joking, but he was not. She felt a trifle piqued.

"I suppose there *are* others," she said sarcastically, "occasionally, who are even more worthless than I!"

"Oh, certainly!" agreed the doctor, promptly. "We get dope-fiends—neurotics—all sorts ——"

Katherine became yet redder. She was angry, and yet not angry. She felt sure that the doctor was deliberately choosing his words in order to secure a certain reaction from her; and yet he secured that reaction just the same.

"What 'sort' would you say I am?" she asked, again sarcastically.

The doctor looked at her fixedly and yet absently for some seconds, as if she were some kind of beetle.

"Are you asking me for a diagnosis?" he asked, mildly, at last.

Though so mild, it was a challenge; and Katherine recognized it as such. "I am!" she flashed.

"Your malady is, Miss Howard," said the doctor, in a thoroughly impersonal tone, "too much ego in your cosmos—as Kipling so charmingly puts it—and too little work. Nothing else in the world, my dear young lady."

"And the prescription?" inquired Katherine, with a would-be mocking little lift of the corner of a lip.

"A decent interest in someone else—and the necessity of earning your bread and butter or starving."

"Suppose I should prefer to starve?"

"You wouldn't."

"No, I suppose I shouldn't. I'm too big a coward." Her tone was bitter.

"Rubbish!" retorted the doctor, bluntly. "For one thing, you're not a coward. Not one woman in twenty has the courage you have."

In spite of herself, Katherine reacted pleasantly to this compliment from the lips of the usually uncomplimentary diagnostician.

"For another thing," continued the doctor, "suicide is not a question either of courage or of cowardice. It's a question of anæmia—particularly moral anæmia. It's a question of vitality. *You* can't die—because you're too full of vitality."

"If I took cyanide of potassium ——?" suggested Katherine, politely.

"You wouldn't take it—that's the answer. You're one of these people who make a big success of life in the end, because they can't stand it to fizzle along; and they usually discover—somewhere in the decade between twenty and thirty"—the doctor gave her a slow smile, and Katherine dropped her eyes hastily, "that they can't die. Then they get down to brass tacks—and make things move!"

(2)

"I hate your doctor," declared Katherine petulantly,

to Baldie, when the latter brought a boxful of American beauties to the sanatorium that afternoon.

"Tell us some news!" retorted Baldie. "What's the matter with him now?"

"Oh—he makes me sick!" replied Katherine, rather vaguely.

Baldie laughed. "What's he been telling you the truth about to-day?"

Katherine scowled—then smiled.

She was sitting up in an invalid's chair, wearing a borrowed rose-colored negligée of Angela's and a fascinating boudoir cap to match, and she looked unusually well. She told him what the doctor had said.

Baldie chuckled. "Little Abie sure doesn't mind what he says!" he commented. "Wonder how he'd diagnose my trouble? Heard from my exams to-day. Flunked again!"

Katherine said, rather unfeelingly, "I should think you'd be used to that by now!"

Baldie suddenly became serious. "Well, it means the jig's up this time. Dad said last time if I flunked again the scholastic groves and avenues would know little Baldie no more. And as Dad pays the bills, I guess Dad knows!" Baldie looked rather lugubrious.

"What will you do now then?" She smiled cynically. "Be the gay and dashing waster, I suppose?"

"Never think it!" retorted Baldie, dolorously. "I'm to go to work!"

"Work! Baldie! You! Break it gently!"

Baldie nodded. Between his fingers he twiddled a little swagger-stick that some girl had given him on his last birthday.

"You, to go to work? Can it be true?" mocked Katherine.

"It can," lamented Baldie. "Worse: it are! Cut off with a shilling—that's wot *hi* am! Me monthly allowance has stopped—ceased—terminated—'there ain't no such animal' any more. I enter upon me menial labors next Monday morn—at fifteen dollars per week—and upon this aforeſaid fifteen dollars, I live, move, and have my being henceforth."

Katherine gasped, "Baldie! But it can't be done!"

"It's got to be done, Dad says." Baldie grinned ruefully. "And when Dad says so, it's usually so."

"Where are you going to work? With your father?"

"'With' is good!" commented Baldie, with keen appreciation. "I'm going to work in the old man's plant, if that's what you mean! In the shop—at the verree bottom—oh, ta!" He waved the swagger-stick gracefully.

"Why didn't you try to get a better job somewhere else?" demanded Katherine.

Baldie looked at her commiseratingly. "You don't know much about getting jobs, my child."

"But certainly ——" objected Katherine.

"And again, certainly not!" interrupted Baldie. "Fifteen dollars, me child, is a princely stipend for a young man who has taken six years to flunk out of

Harvard, and has nothing but his beauty to recommend him to an unfeeling world."

Katherine looked a little incredulous. Surely Baldie was mistaken! All the same, his positiveness made her slightly uneasy.

(3)

The following Monday evening, Baldie came again to see her.

"Behold the horny-handed son of toil!" he said, announcing himself with a flourish.

Katherine looked him over, cautiously. "You don't *look* any different," she remarked.

Baldie regarded the trousers of his sixty-dollar suit with complacency. "You didn't expect my clothes to wear out at once, did you?" he inquired. "Wait till they do—and I buy a new trousseau out of the surplus from fifteen dollars a week! Believe me, girl, when that sad day comes, even the eyes of love will be apt to perceive a difference in my noble appearance!"

"How do you like working?" inquired Katherine, a trifle anxiously.

Baldie winked. "You know me, Kat!" he replied, cryptically. "I like work just about like a cat likes a bath!"

"What do you have to do?" Katherine's thirst for information was unusual.

"Feed a piece of cowhide into a slot and shove a lever."

"That all?"

"That's all—till the next time."

"That sounds easy enough."

"Oh, it is!"

Katherine was thinking to herself, "If Baldie gets fifteen dollars for doing a simple little thing like *that*, I can certainly earn fifty or sixty, at least,—in some line."

(4)

The next morning Angela came, bringing her Irish crochet to occupy herself with. Angela had been very faithful in her visits during Katherine's convalescence. She had not been particularly cheerful company, however. At first, being under the impression that Katherine had got her pneumonia by going out riding with Baldie in the night air without a wrap, she had felt called upon to show considerable severity. As she pointed out to Katherine, now that the latter was in reduced circumstances, she could not afford such indulgences as were likely to let her in for doctor's bills and so forth.

"Oh, you won't have to pay it, Angy!" Katherine had retorted maliciously. "I still have some means ——"

"Well, anyway ——" Angela had persisted; but the starch had gone out of her severity.

This phase being over, however, another depressing one replaced it. Angela and Harold were on the outs, of late. It looked as if their engagement might scarcely stand the strain they were putting upon it. Angela's morning conversations were mainly bulletins of the latest developments in the quarrel. Papa Gray-

son was thinking of retiring from business. Paul being quite impracticable as a successor, Mr. Grayson felt that he would like to place his interest in the hands of his son-in-law to be. Harold, however, was pig-headedly devoted to the idea of entering the ministry. He had been called to a small suburban church, and was to take charge of it the first of August. Angela wished him to yield to her father's judgment and take over the business. Mr. Grayson was willing to give him three years to learn it—and the General Manager was perfectly competent to run it anyway; all Harold would have to do would be to fatten upon the unearned increment. Angela said that if Harold loved her he would do it. Harold replied he could not love her so much, loved he not honor—by which he meant his faithfulness to his divine call—more. Therefore the strain. It was a deadlock. Angela cried a good deal, in Katherine's company, for though she realized that Harold was entirely in the wrong, she loved him dearly, should never love anyone else, and, if the engagement should be actually broken, she should not care to live.

"Really, Kitty," she had remarked solemnly, one morning when the outlook was especially gloomy, "I keep remembering some of the things you used to say. I didn't sympathize with them then; but now I solemnly believe that if Harold and I are really parted, I shall kill myself!"

"Oh, no, you won't!" retorted Katherine, with a laugh. "Still, Angy," she added, "you'd make a sweet corpse!"

Angela started uncomfortably. Katherine laughed.

"But, Angy," Katherine had continued, "why don't you let Harold be a minister if he wants to? I should think that would appeal to you! You used to like it well enough!"

Angela lifted her large, luminous eyes to Katherine. "I did," she replied, gravely. "It would be something of a sacrifice for me to give it up, too. But I feel that Papa has been so good to me always, and now if there's any way I can make it up to him—and he will feel so badly if the business has to go out of the family—Paul has been such a cruel disappointment to him—and think how much good we could do with the money!"

Katherine had laughed. "Oh, you sweet humbug!" she had exclaimed.

This morning, however, Angela burst in jubilantly. Harold had yielded, at last. It had been the argument of how much good he could do with the money that had got him. He had resigned his church, and was beginning "at the bottom" to learn the business, the unearned increment of which was to be, by his expenditure, later, such a blessing to suffering humanity.

Katherine, too, had a piece of news. If she kept on as well as she was going now, she might be discharged in a week or so. The sore spot in her bronchial tubes was all gone; it was now merely a case of getting up her strength.

"How splendid!" murmured Angela. "Of course you'll come straight to us, Katherine," she added.

"Of course I'll not!" retorted Katherine crisply. Angela's tone was already beginning to have the unmistakable inflection of the patron. "Did you ever get the impression that I was a grafter, Angy?"

"Katherine dearest! As if it would be grafting!" remonstrated Angela. "As if," a little vexed, "Mother and I were the kind to have such thoughts! And, anyway, how absurd! Haven't you often visited us for weeks at a time ——?"

"Ah, but then I didn't *have* to," said Katherine, shrewdly.

"Well, what are you going to do?" inquired Angela, rather tartly. No one likes to have a kindly offer—especially a kindly offer that one has rather dreaded making and has felt one's self rather meritorious in making—flung back slap in one's face, without even a thank you.

It is true, Katherine always had been rude, and Angela should have been used to it; had, in fact, been used to it; but now it somehow seemed different. It is one thing to fling aside, with light informality, an invitation to visit; quite another so to treat an offer of actual food and shelter. Angela had proposed making almost a sister of Katherine in her misfortune; and Katherine, not knowing which side her bread was buttered on, evidently, had flouted her in the very start.

"Going to work," Katherine replied calmly, to Angela's question.

"Work!" echoed Angela. "Well, of course that is the sensible thing, dear. Kitty Matthewson was telling me, only the other day, that a friend of hers

was telling about some woman who has just come out of a sanatorium and wants a companion. Nothing to do, you know, and, Kitty thought, fine wages. I'll just call Kitty up to-night and ask her who ——"

"You don't need to bother, Angela," interrupted Katherine, in a voice which had hardened slightly. "I think I'll just look around a little myself, thank you."

"You don't mean you won't let us—won't let Father—help you get ——?"

"It's awfully good of you; and awfully good of your father," said Katherine. "You've all done too much for me already."

"Oh—if that's all!" Angela breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, maybe, if you'd rather, we could get you a job as social secretary. That's a grand job to have. You meet so many interesting people, and do so many interesting things—and you're not at all declassed, you know. I've just been reading a book written by a social secretary to some social leader; it describes all the New York society people, only under assumed names, of course; it is perfectly thrilling;—published anonymously, of course. In the end she is going to marry the society leader's lawyer, or something of that kind, I think. Now I should think Father would surely know—only of course you haven't stenography," Angela's face fell. "Still, perhaps we could find you a place where you wouldn't need stenography——"

"Really, Angela, you don't understand at all," interrupted Katherine, stubbornly. "I am going to find

something for myself. I'm not going to take something that is handed out to me half as charity because I am the unfortunate schoolmate of Mr. Grayson's daughter. I am going out on my own."

Angela took a look at the compressed lips and obstinately set chin of her friend, and capitulated.

"Well, I think you are unwise, Kathy," she said gently. "To throw away my Father's help. The best positions are always got through personal influence, you know. You can't hope for much if you go out on your own, as you put it. Independence is all very well, Kathy dear, but—why not get your job first, and then start being independent?"

"Because then it would be too late!" cried Katherine, smiling.

"Why too late?"

"Because then I should be under obligations to all the people that helped get me the job."

"How perfectly absurd!" said Angela.

"Beside, I couldn't get a job of social secretary without stenography; don't fool yourself, Angy, about that; and as for companion—good grief, Angy, wouldn't you be sorry for the person that had me for a companion? She'd keep me just about three days—and if she didn't discharge me at the end of the time, I fancy I'd be ready to discharge myself!"

"Well," began Angela, raising her eyebrows, "of course ——"

"Beggars can't be choosers. Yes, I know. But I'm not going to be a beggar. That's just the point."

"Well, anyway you'll come and stay with us till you get something?"

Katherine shook her head.

"But Kat!" Angela's voice was sharpened with genuine irritation. "This passes absurdity! What else can you do? Surely you can't have much of your money left after paying—— What will you live on?"

"On my fat, if necessary," replied Katherine grimly.

Angela sighed. "You always were perfectly hopeless, Katherine."

She rose to go. "Well, I hope you'll change your mind, when it really comes to the point. I really think that after all Father has done for you, you really owe it to him to consult ——"

Katherine laughed.

Angela reddened. "Well, good-bye, Kathy," she said, kissing her friend. "I only hope you'll never regret casting off your friends this way!"

"But then you could never say 'I told you so'!" retorted Katherine, teasingly. "Never mind, Angie! After all, if I starve, it's my funeral, you know!"

"Which is another way," said Angela, walking out, very red and indignant, "of saying None of my business!"

(5)

Katherine told Baldie all about the near-quarrel the next time that horny-handed son of toil called.

Baldie scratched his head. "Really going out on

your own, are you, Kat?" he inquired. "Well, I hope you aren't going to cross me off your calling-list, too?"

"Well, I just am!" retorted Katherine, cheerfully. "I'm going to cross everybody off! I'm going to start with a clean slate!"

Baldie whistled.

"I don't want to butt in, Kat," he said, after a few moments. "But how about the finances? You know you may not get anything right away, and even if you do, it is sure to be a week at least before you sight your pay-envelope."

"That's just where I want you to help me!" announced Katherine.

Baldie brightened visibly. "Shoot!" he said. "The sky's the limit! If I haven't got it, I'll borrow it; and if I can't borrow it, I'll steal it!"

Katherine smiled; a very warm, friendly smile. "Nothing so vampirish as that, Baldie! I just want you to sell some old clothes for me."

Baldie stared.

"Aren't there people who buy second-hand clothes?" asked Katherine, a trifle impatiently.

"Sure there are," said Baldie, "but ——"

"Well, I have five trunks of clothing that might just as well be sold as eaten up by the moth. What use will a—a cash-girl have for Liberty satin evening gowns and chiffon negligées? There must be thousands of dollars' worth of stuff in those trunks! Why, my fur coat alone cost twelve hundred dollars."

"Ye-es," admitted Baldie, "but ——"

"But nothing!" retorted Katherine briskly. "Will you, or will you not, undertake to sell them for me?"

"Why, of course I will, Kat, but—how much do you expect to get for them?"

"Well, I certainly ought to get fifteen hundred or so at the very *least*."

"Don't you think it!" said Baldie.

And Baldie was right. Fur coat and all, Katherine got an even five hundred dollars. Five hundred dollars! It was robbery! . . .

Still five hundred dollars is enough to live on till one establishes one's self in a modest wage-earning position; and all might have been well, had Dr. Abrams known that this was all his wilful patient had behind her. But unfortunately Katherine had not confided her financial difficulties to him, nothing in her manner suggested poverty, and his bill almost swallowed up the whole five hundred.

Baldie wanted to pay the bill.

Katherine refused.

"It is sweet of you, Baldie," she said, over the telephone on which she called him up at luncheon-time, "but you can't do it. I'm going to pay my own hospital bills, so you may as well make up your mind to it."

Baldie said something about Katherine's independence which should not have been said, even in the hearing of no other lady than the operator.

Katherine, however, was determined. She was not going to start out under obligation to anybody—not even Baldie. She wanted a clean slate. She endeav-

ored, though with scant success, to convince him, that evening, that it was not in insult to his fifteen dollars a week that she would not let him pay her bills. "I'd insist just the same if you were a millionaire!" she cried.

"Kat! I can't stand it!" burst out Baldie. "I get your point of view, all right, but you don't know! You don't know what's ahead of you! It isn't going to be so much of a cinch as you think, getting a job! You've got to let me pay it, Kat!"

"How long since a young man can force his money on a girl?" inquired Katherine coldly.

"Of course —— But ——" He fumbled in his breast-pocket. "Here's five hundred dollars. Take it as a loan, then—at interest, if you like—take part of it ——"

Katherine smilingly shook her head.

Baldie slouched down despondently in his chair. He knew, less from his brief contact with the working-world as a unit in it than from a much longer previous contact with it as a gilded outsider, pretty much what was ahead of Katherine, an untrained, overindulged girl trying to "break in" where there are too many already.

"Well, at least promise me that if you get in a pinch, you will come to me —— There! See! Your money's in an envelope, and there it'll stay, ready for you any time, without even a trip to the bank ——"

Katherine interrupted impatiently. "No, no! Baldie, don't you see that the issue is *psychological*? If I'm going out on my own, it must be a genuine situation,

not a play. I must know that if I don't earn my daily bread I shall genuinely starve: not that if I fail I can slump back into the kind arms of my friends! If I feel *that* way, I *shall* fail! I must erect now a barrier of my own pride that there'll be no crossing, later! I'm going to cut loose—absolutely—from everybody. You—Angela—nobody—will even have my address—till I've made good! If you never hear from me again, you'll know I went under! But if I go under, it's going to be a genuine shipwreck—not 'camera-stuff.' And if I make good, it's going to be a genuine achievement—the doing of K. Howard herself, and no one else! And I'm going to make good, Baldie! Never doubt that!”

Baldie held out his hand. “Put it there, old pal!”

Katherine met his sturdy grip with one as firm.

“I sort of understand how you feel about it, Kat. You've got to go the whole hog or none. Well, I won't stand in your way. But if you do get in a tight place, ever, remember that over in Birmingham a good-for-nothing fellow feeding cowhide into a machine eight hours a day is—oh, *darn* it all!”

And Baldie, becoming inarticulate, suddenly gave her hand a last convulsive wrench, and bolted out of the sanatorium reception-room and out of the sanatorium, without a good-night or a good-bye. And when he tried to get her on the 'phone the next morning at breakfast, to beg another farewell interview, he learned that she had already gone, and that no one at the sanatorium had any address at which to reach her.

CHAPTER XI

ADVENTURE

(I)

FIVE o'clock of the same day, in a South Boston boarding-house which had been recommended to Katherine by the Y. W. C. A., that omniscient adviser of young women in Katherine's situation.

Four walls the like of which, before that afternoon, she had never pictured to herself, now bounded Katherine's horizon.

The walls were covered with wall-paper of a primrose pattern. It must have originally been the most ingenuous, the naivest, of wall-papers, but now, alas, it bore the marks of sophistication upon it. Over the small imitation-oak table were spattered ink-spots: a perfect cataract of ink-spots: sins of some lean-bellied writer of rejected manuscripts goaded to madness by the obstinacy of a cheap fountain-pen. About the wash-stand were gray blotches of dried dirty water recklessly flung about: sins, perhaps of some primitive-mannered mechanic who had used to wait for his wash till he got home. And here and there were patches of plaster, rubbed bald: ditches gouged out: sins of occupants with individual tastes in the arrangement of commode and chiffonier.

The records of Katherine's predecessors were not

all on the walls, either. Everywhere, on all the flat wooden edges of things, were innumerable small scooping-out burns: reminiscent of innumerable cigarettes; and on the floor by the bed was a large round hole in the carpet and a charred circle on the planks where a conflagration, it would seem, had been narrowly averted by the providential rousing of the drowsy smoker-in-bed.

Then, on the gas-jet were spatters of grease, as from a ten-cent frying-pan held above the light; and in the edge of the little pine mantel-shelf and in the window-frame diagonally opposite, were two nails and a dangling remnant of string—mute witnesses to the pathetic economies of some extra-impecunious lodger.

Katherine sat in a faded and ragged upholstered armchair—the sort that rocks on a squeaky standard—and looked about her. Her hair was tousled, her sleeves were rolled up, she was damp with perspiration, and dusty. Still her look was a look of high satisfaction.

She liked her state of tousled hair, bare arms, perspiration and dust. They helped make the Adventure real; and the sense of adventure was, as yet, uppermost in her. Her tousled hair, her bare arms, the perspiration and the dust helped make the adventure real, as costume and wig help the amateur actor to a realization of his part; and what thrill is there in an adventure unless it possesses the illusion of reality? What thrill is there in an adventure if one feels that at any moment one can, by mere act of will, step out of it? The thrill comes from the very feeling that

one has voluntarily stepped into an incongruous situation which has closed round one, and from which one does not know whether one will come out alive or not; in which one does not know what will happen to one.

Probably to no occupant before Katherine, had this commonplace room been other than commonplace: to Katherine it was romantic, the fitting scene of adventure. Its utter shabbiness, the reminiscent smears upon it, its carelessness of them, made it romantic. The ink, the burns, the dilapidated clothes-line, peopled it with ghosts—ghosts of the tenants of another world from Katherine's, among whose phantoms her presence was a romantic incongruity. Romantic in precisely the same way was the hanging of her clothes, the plain ones she had not sold, which yet bore visibly the stamp of a severe elegance, in the shallow, papered closet; and the laying of her quantities of lingerie, gloves, collars, and blouses in the cranky shallow drawers of a little pine bureau which assuredly had never before held such lingerie, such gloves, such collars, such blouses.

And, as the final touch of romance and reality, on her table lay a small pile of newspapers—three of them. She had brought them in with her so as to look at the Female Want Ads after dinner.

She bathed: a cold sponge-bath; and dressed. By then it was six o'clock, and she went down to dinner.

The boarding-house dining-room was already well filled with diners: hot, sticky-looking men in wool suits; fagged-looking women, mostly spinsters, in

slightly mussed shirt-waists; two or three bobbed-haired girls in elaborate unsuitable dresses. The clatter of knives and forks and crockery and conversation rose to assail Katherine as she descended the staircase. As she entered the dining-room a lull received her: the business of eating and conversing being somewhat frankly suspended to permit a brief survey, from all parts of the room, of the new arrival.

The dinner was typical of its kind. The ubiquitous fly ran greedy competition to the other boarders; the dishes were thick and spoke rather too frankly of a sketchy washing; the regular guests, who had never known anything better, grumbled at this and that; but to Katherine it was all an adventure, part of the great Adventure, and she ate with zest.

(2)

Three weeks of tramping the streets made the adventure real enough. There was nothing that could possibly be considered fictitious about job-hunting in midsummer. Everywhere it was the same story over and over. Midsummer was the worst time of the whole year to get work. Employers everywhere were laying off help, rather than taking on extra. About September they might have something for her; but just now there was nothing.

Almost everybody was fairly kind to her. Once in a while, advice was proffered gratis: and it was always to the effect that it would be highly advisable for her to take some special course or other, and fit herself for some definite occupation. A business course—a

course in stenography—a course in dressmaking, in millinery, in domestic science—almost any kind of course would improve her chances.

But how could she take any kind of a course when she had not money enough to live on while she was taking it, not to mention paying the tuition fee?

One kindly adviser suggested borrowing the money, if she could.

But this she would not do.

Three weeks of job-hunting, followed by one week of book-agenting (net proceeds, one dollar of commissions), followed by one week of trying to break into the movies and finding the latter industry a blank wall.

On the thirty-fifth night, secure in her room, she investigated her safety-pocket, where she had been carrying her slender capital. When she had counted up the contents, and added to this total the sum of the small change in her pocketbook, she felt a queer sinking sensation in her stomach.

For the first time since she had entered the world of the wage-earner she did not bathe and change her blouse before dinner. She had no heart to. She went down just as she was: hot and sticky and crumpled.

The dining-room was already filled with diners: hot, sweaty-looking men in wool suits; fagged-looking spinners in mussed shirt-waists and shiny skirts; two or three bobbed-headed girls in elaborate unsuitable dresses. The clatter of knives and forks and crockery and tongues assailed her as she entered. The ubiquitous fly ran a horrific competition with the human

feeders, and sickened her. The dishes were thick, and spoke too clamorously of a sketchy washing, so that she could hardly swallow the food off them. The boarders about her, who had never known anything better, grumbled, grumbled, grumbled, with wearisome futility. She ate the least she could subsist on.

For the dinner was no longer an adventure. Katherine had lost the sense of adventure. The book-agenting (a hideous experience) had, as Baldie would have phrased it, kicked the Adventure in the slats.

CHAPTER XII

BRASS TACKS

(I)

THE inevitable temptation finally assailed her to communicate with Baldie and borrow some money. But the barrier of pride which she had built behind her, prevented.

She had stepped, voluntarily, into this situation; but she could not step out of it. It had closed soundlessly behind her, and even the seam of its joining was invisible. She did not know whether she could master it or not; or whether it would eventually close in, like Poe's horror-chamber, and crush her.

Instead of communicating with Baldie, she took up once more her tramping of the streets, boldly and futilely invading offices and stores, asking for work. Sometimes she was rebuffed with a fair degree of courtesy—even kindness—sometimes with none. But she was invariably rebuffed. No one had any work for her. It looked as if the walls were closing in. For several days now she had had no luncheons. Her board was paid in advance till the end of the week; but when the end of the week came, unless she had a position and could stave off her landlady till pay-day, she would have to get out. And then where would she go?

She stopped walking up and down the streets, interrupting busy men in offices. There was nothing to be got at, that way.

(2)

It was Friday. Her next week's board would be due to-morrow.

The day was broiling hot. The midsummer sun, unveiled, poured down from a molten sky, and was reflected in a killing glare from blistering pavements. The clang of busy ambulances threaded the web of the city's hum like a shuttle with a vivid strand of scarlet traversing a dull gray woof.

Katherine stood, aimless, in the heat of Washington Street.

It was near luncheon time, but there was to be no luncheon for her.

What should she do to pass away the rest of the day? Her feet, driven to do hard service in unsuitable gear, tortured her. She would go somewhere and sit down. She had come to the place marked No Thoroughfare.

The friendly dusk of a wide, deep doorway lured her. It was Christie's. She might go into Christie's waiting-room and sit as long as she wished. True, in Christie's many of her old associates were wont to shop; but there was little chance that any of them would be in the city at this season—especially on such a day.

She stepped inside. The coolness of the vast interior—it seemed cool when one first came into it

from the outside—received her graciously. She was making her way along the aisle by the lace-counter toward the elevator, when suddenly, right beside her, a queer gasp sounded—a gasp that was more like a groan. There was a shrill exclamation; the sound of a body slipping gently to the floor; then turmoil. A salesgirl had fainted. An excited crowd sprang up from nowhere, jamming Katherine against the counter. The salesgirl lay just beneath her eyes—white and motionless, like death. Katherine had never seen anyone lie so long in a faint before. A floor-walker wormed his way through the jam—officially pushed the crowd back—two of the store-boys came running—the three of them lifted the limp form—carried it away—through crowds that fell apart respectfully—enjoyably thrilled.

Katherine followed.

The salesgirl was carried to the emergency-room, off the ladies' waiting-room, where there was a nurse.

Katherine sat down in the waiting-room.

After what seemed a long time, men appeared with a stretcher. They vanished into the emergency-room. A crowd again formed. The door reopened. The men with the stretcher reappeared. The stretcher bore something covered with a blanket.

"Is someone dead, nurse?" screamed a hysterical woman in the crowd.

"Dead?" echoed the nurse crisply. "No; but she's had a stroke. Heat-prostration."

The women began to murmur among themselves, women who had never seen each other before talking

to each other like old acquaintances: "Who was it?"—"Poor thing!"—"No wonder! Such a day! I thought I should have a heat-prostration myself!"—"Was it a customer or one of the girls?"—"A sales-girl, I believe."—"One of the salesgirls at the lace-counter."

Fifteen minutes later, Katherine had a job.

(3)

In ten weeks, Miss Johns, Katherine's companion at the lace-counter, had come to think of "Miss Hale" as a nice girl, but a queer one.

Miss Johns was a nice girl, too. She worked for the purpose of being able to have better clothes and more good times than her father could have bought her. She lived at home and paid no board. Sometimes she helped her mother wash the dishes after supper; but more often she went right away to the movies. As she worked so hard all day, it was necessary for her to have some relaxation in the evening. Miss Johns was not queer. She was a perfectly normal girl, marking time at the lace-counter till some young man should take her by the hand and lead her via the altar to a neat little suburban home of her own.

When she called "Miss Hale" queer, she was really referring to the fact that Katherine had consistently refused all proposals to make the fourth member of select square parties to the movies or elsewhere; to the fact that Katherine seemed to have no interest in the pleasures of a normal young girl's life, or in its

well-known business. Katherine presented to Miss Johns, at this time, the appearance of a misguided young woman treading an obstinate path that would inevitably lead to spinsterhood.

What Miss Johns could not know was that Katherine had been so surfeited with the pleasures of life for the last five or six years that she was sickened of them; and that she had no respect for men, in their capacity as males, and no need of them. Paolo had seen to that; and poor, beguiled Davis Vaughn had innocently finished off the good work: sheer sex had placed him, so pitiably, despite reason, judgment, tradition and all, in Katherine's scornful power. She had no respect for men, and no need of them: that was how she herself expressed it.

Moreover, she was busy "catching up" with the cost of living.

She had started her career as a wage-earner one week behind the game, and she had been catching up ever since. Fortunately she had had no clothes to buy; and her landlady, who was not by any means a bad sort, and who felt that the aristocratic Miss Hale lent valuable "tone" to her establishment, had given orders in the kitchen that scraps of last night's dinner were to be wrapped in a bit of newspaper every day for a luncheon for Miss Hale—this without extra charge. But for this gratuity, Katherine could not possibly have kept her head above water. Thanks to it, and to her bounteous hoard of shoes, stockings, gloves (the articles that wear out so terribly fast), Katherine, in ten weeks, had at last caught up.

It had been a hard pull, morally ; and now that, with the payment of the last dollar of her arrears that morning to her landlady, the strain was relaxed, Katherine realized how tense a strain it had been.

In ten weeks, seven of them scorching weather, Katherine had become a little sallow, a little thin, a little edgy as to temper ; but she had learned a great deal.

For instance, she had learned that it is the runaway Dime that lures off the Disappearing Dollar ; that cigarettes are too much of a luxury, not only for the pocketbook, but also for the constitution ; that once you start mending a pair of stockings, your course is tragically a toboggan slide of darns, increasing in velocity toward the finish ; that cardboard properly applied and frequently renewed can be made to serve the remaining life in the uppers, when shoe-soles have worn through in holes ; that a glove in the hand outwears two on it ; that one is not jeered at in the streets, even if one does wear a summer hat into October.

For, though long on everything else, Katherine was short on hats. It was now the middle of October, and Katherine was still, and with impunity, wearing last April's hat.

She was very sick of it, however.

Miss Johns was surprised, the morning that Katherine caught up and the tension snapped, to see Miss Hale hurl April's hat destructively into her locker and slam the door upon it. Miss Johns had not dreamed that Miss Hale could be so human.

"Why don't you take the rose off and put some

velvet on it?" suggested Miss Johns, sympathetically. "It would give it more of an autumn-y look."

Katherine, fresh from the tension, looked as if she would like to say something unjustifiably disagreeable to the innocent Miss Johns; but ten weeks' discipline behind the counter of a store which boasts the politest sales-force in the city, had taught her to hold her tongue fairly well; so she made no reply, but went, in moody silence, down to the laces.

Custom was slack for a while, so she busied herself with sorting the boxes and putting to place some that had been displaced. She was thus occupied when an exclamation near at hand made her jump.

"Well—*Katherine Howard!*"

(4)

Of course she had known it must happen sometime, now that people were back in town; for the old set all shopped at Christie's—and now it had happened. Separated from her only by the counter, stood Bettina, and a girl named Saxe, whom Katherine knew slightly. They all shook hands, across the counter; Miss Saxe with a faint air of rising to a rather extraordinary occasion; Bettina impulsively, with a squeeze; Katherine a trifle defiantly.

"We've all been perfectly wild, wondering what had become of you!" cried Bettina. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"Nowhere," said Katherine. "I've been right here for ten weeks."

"Well, how are you, Kat dear?"

"Very well, thank you."

"You're not looking very well."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

Bettina flushed. "You know I didn't mean it that way. You only look as if you weren't getting enough"—Bettina had intended to say "enough to eat"; but, warned by Katherine's look, she modified her conclusion—"enough fresh air."

A mild-mannered customer, too timid to assert herself, was looking daggers at Katherine, so Bettina drew in her horns.

"Will you come and see me, Kat dear? May I come and see you?"

Katherine shook her head, turning perfunctorily to the mild customer.

Bettina considered a moment in silence.

"Well," she said, "I'm due at Celeste's this minute to have my hair done. Fancy! Marie's little sister is coming out—at last! To-night. Marie is so peeved!" Bettina wrinkled her nose delightedly. "They've kept the poor child in as long as they dare, to give Marie a chance. It's really been a scandal! Wish you were going, Kat!"

"Thanks."

"Well, so long! But I shall come again; and next time I shall bring Angela, and then you will *have* to treat me nicely!" Bettina nodded a gay farewell, and, with the speechless Miss Saxe, hurried off, and was swallowed up in the stream of shoppers.

"Are those friends of yours?" inquired Miss Johns,

a little later, considerably awed by all this talk of hair-dressers and débutantes.

Katherine nodded.

"Gee, that one that was talking to you was a swell-looking girl!" commented Miss Johns, sucking in her breath audibly, between drawn-in lips. "What's her name?" . . .

Bettina was a swell-looking girl that morning.

She had on one of the new little feather toques, perched saucily over one ear; a new fall suit, with the jaunty flaring lines that were just arrived from Paris; a pair of beautiful gloves. A simple expensive bit of blouse showed between the open fronts of her suit-coat; a bit of sheer, hemstitched batiste fell correctly over the collar of the coat. Doubtless her pumps, and smart, high spats, if they had been visible to Miss John's eyes, would have seemed the climax of the swellness.

"Appetite," said Katherine, slowly, to Miss Johns, "is a curious thing. You overeat at Sunday dinner; subsequently you hate the thought of food; you absent yourself from the supper-table; all through an uncomfortable evening you know that you will never want to eat again;—and then, about eleven P. M. when everything is put away in the ice-box, you suddenly discover that you are ravenous. You are ready to offer your kingdom for a sandwich!"

Miss Johns looked, round-eyed, at Katherine.

What Katherine was trying to tell Miss Johns, in lieu of other listener, was that her appetite for the flesh-pots had suddenly, at sight of Bettina, returned.

Katherine wanted a new suit, like Bettina's; she wanted a smart little feather toque; she wanted doe-colored gloves, a frilly blouse, gleaming pumps and trim spats! Above all she wanted the single spotted green orchid, that Bettina had worn, like the hall-mark of luxurious æstheticism, on the bosom of her coat.

She wanted Bettina's day, too, even more ravenously than Bettina's clothes. She wanted to be on her way now to Madame Celeste's to have her hair done; she wanted to lunch daintily at the Green Dragon; to take a taxi-cab home; she wanted to exchange suit and blouse for a filmy negligée, and loll all the afternoon over a trashy love-novel till time for a beauty-sleep and a bath.

Above all, she wanted to crown the pretty, useless day with jewels, a ravishing gown, a delectable dinner, and then the party at the Hunts': lights, flowers, music, ices, chatter and laughter, bevies of prettily half-dressed girls, of nicely groomed young men, all as idle, all as useless, all as gaily immune from responsibility as the Katherine of her hungry dreams; all conspiring, for one evening, to make her forget that the world—the real world—was full of work, of struggle, of mended clothes and unmended rags.

Bettina's world—the world Katherine conjured up in her hungry dream—was a pretty world: it shone like a round, colorful soap-bubble. The real world was a grim terrible thing, in contrast, with the colors mostly smeared; a vast lump of rocks and earth, rent constantly by the upheavals of inner fire.

Bettina's race were pretty, exquisite bubble-creatures, compound of light and mirroring film. The real people, in contrast, were a Titan race: toilers, laborers, parched, sweaty, grim—no loveliness to them! They toiled, they clutched their lumpish food, they drank to drown their sorrows, they slept heavily, they woke at the relentless summons of a bit of homely mechanism, they hurried, unbathed, into the sodden clothes of yesterday, and toiled again—toiled to make the bubble possible—preposterous spectacle! A Titan race toiling titanically to sustain a bubble! Bending misshapen, gigantic backs beneath the bubble! . . .

Katherine remembered once seeing Mildred Speer, a frail slip of a girl, driving a pair of powerful black Russians in a high cart, through the Fenway. The thought had come to her then, "What if those creatures should take the bits in their teeth and run?"

She had conjured up the picture of Mildred's wrists, blue-veined, frail and slim—contrasting them with the great proud necks of the Russians, the splendid chests, the ripple of mighty sinews in legs and thighs—and she had turned cold—as if Mildred had suddenly lain dead before her, crushed like an egg-shell. Then the thought had come to her, "They do not know their power! They do not know they *could* do it! That is Mildred's salvation. That is why she has lived this long." . . .

So it was with the Titans. They did not know their power. . . .

And now Katherine was chained, down among the

toilers. Somewhere on the bubble, because Katherine and Mabel Johns, for the meagerest of living-wages, were selling Christie's laces to Christie's customers, Christie's daughters were having a day like Bettina's. . . .

The irate voice of a neglected customer, demanding attention, broke, like the last intolerable stamp of her servitude, upon Katherine's ears. She was rude to the customer.

And after the latter had gone, without making her purchase, borne on her righteous ire as on a raging flood, Mabel Johns turned to Katherine and said, in a voice weak with alarm: "Do you know who that was? It was Mrs. DeSchamm!"

(5)

As Katherine, that night, jammed on April's hat, with the single rose—once so smart—now looking more drabbed and amorphous than it had in the morning, she sighed volcanically.

"This *has* been a day!" she ejaculated. . . .

Such a day inevitably has a sequel.

The sequel to Katherine's day came in the form of a summons, about noon of the next day, to the office of "the man who hires and fires" as the popular song so euphoniously describes him.

Mr. DeSchamm was looking very much discomposed. He liked hiring, but with all his good-natured soul he hated firing. Also he had a sneaking sympathy with the guilty Katherine. He lived with Mrs. DeSchamm!

"You were reported yesterday for impertinence to a customer, Miss Hale," he began, uncomfortably.

Katherine said nothing.

There was an awkward pause.

"Well—er—have you—haven't you any—er—there might be extenuating circumstances, you know, which would—there are usually two sides to ——"

"I'm afraid not, this time," said Katherine.

"You mean to say—er—to admit ——?"

"The customer spoke to me rather sharply for not waiting on her promptly; and I was rude to her."

Mr. DeSchamm's hue became apoplectic.

"Quite wrong—quite wrong, Miss Hale!" he said. "At the same time—it seems to me ——" He floundered. "Well, now, Miss Hale, you wouldn't be likely to forget yourself very soon again after this lesson, would you?"

Katherine replied fervently that she would not.

Mr. DeSchamm considered—he wriggled—he frowned—he fingered a paper-cutter nervously—he cleared his throat.

"Well, Miss Hale," he said at last, "suppose we give you another chance. Only be sure not to let it happen again. Remember the watchword of this store is: Courtesy!"

"From the salesgirl to the customer," said Katherine, with a little smile.

Mr. DeSchamm grinned. "Precisely," he agreed. "The customer *cannot* be in the wrong! Don't forget it. It will be to your advantage."

Miss Johns was awaiting fearfully her associate's return.

"Are you fired?" she asked anxiously.

Katherine shook her head.

"I'm to have another chance," she replied. "But I'm never again to forget about the Divine Right of Customers. Oh, the whole thing makes me sick!" she burst out. "What right has J. Howard Christie to say that I shall be insulted by anyone who happens to want to insult me, and not say a word in reply?"

"But if you do talk back, you're liable to be fired," said Miss Johns, practically.

(6)

Mrs. DeSchamm must have known and distrusted her husband's fatal softness of heart, for within twenty-four hours she came, to see with her own eyes, whether or not she had been avenged.

Miss Johns gave Katherine a surreptitious nudge, and the latter looked up, to meet the bleak stare, focussed upon her, of the outraged lady.

"She came to see if you had been fired!" whispered Miss Johns, apprehensively. "Now she *will* raise the Old Nick with poor DeSchamm!"

Katherine laughed. She had a vision of the irate Mrs. DeSchamm bursting in upon her guilty spouse and reading him the riot act in the mere semi-privacy of his office, to the probable edification of several clerks.

Sure enough, within the hour Katherine was summoned again.

Mr. DeSchamm looked uncomfortable, but he also looked ireful. Even the worm will turn; and no man likes to be curtain-lectured by his wife before his stenographers.

"Miss Hale," he began, "the customer who—er—complained of you seems to—er—feel that nothing but your dismissal is the proper penalty for your—er—impertinence."

Katherine said nothing.

"It is not the policy of the store to—er—lose a good customer in such a case. On the other hand—er—sometimes a certain compromise can—er—be effected so as not to lose an efficient employee, either. I am afraid I cannot leave you at the lace counter any longer; but possibly we can make an exchange. I have a young lady in the Ladies' Suits who has not—er—been giving complete satisfaction in that department. I have been fearing I should have to discharge her; but I feel that she might possibly do better in a—er—different department. At any rate, it would be a chance for her. You have good height, a good figure, and a good manner for the suits. Should you like to try it there?"

"But when the—customer comes to buy herself a suit——?" inquired Katherine.

"The—er—customer does not buy her suits here."

"Thank you, then; I should like it very much."

"I may tell you," continued Mr. DeSchamm, "that the pay is somewhat better——" He paused and grinned. "Hardly the proper Sunday-School-story ending for your transgressions!"

"But truer to real life!" retorted Katherine.

Mr. DeSchamm looked at her rather curiously.

"So you believe that the wicked do flourish like a green bay-tree?" he inquired.

"Oh—absolutely!" said Katherine.

Mr. DeSchamm looked at her thoughtfully for a few minutes. "Well," he said, "I'd never go too far on that assumption, if I were you."

Katherine knew what he meant, though she affected not to.

(7)

At the end of her first complete week in the Ladies' Suits and Cloaks, Katherine's pay-envelope contained four crisp one-dollar bills more than it had ever before contained. And in the Hat Department was a little feather toque—a cheap imitation of the toques that Bettina and her friends were wearing but very chic on Katherine, for she had tried it on. It cost just exactly four dollars.

That night she fought her battle; and it was as hard a battle as she ever had to fight—but she won it. In the morning she told her landlady she did not need to have any more lunches put up. She saved out two of the extra dollars for lunches; bought a feather and a bit of velvet with the third dollar, to retrim April's hat nearer to the season; and the fourth dollar she put in the Savings Bank.

Green bay-tree or not, she was determined she would flourish.

CHAPTER XIII

BLANCHE

(I)

THE suit department adjoined, at one end, the main blouse department. Katherine's usual position was at that end, and she often noticed a fair, tired-looking girl who sold the chiffon blouses.

Katherine looked at her often.

She was not a pretty girl. Her forehead was too prominent, her features too small and delicate, her hair too pale, her skin too whitely colorless.

There was something fascinating about her, however.

Was it her effect of fragility? Or was it the curious illusion she produced of a soul too vehement for this containing fragility?

Her hair, which had been cut, hung softly about her ears, like that of a child.

Katherine thought her somewhat like a porcelain vase with fermenting wine too closely stoppered in it—a rather silly conceit, perhaps, since they do not put wine in vases.

Katherine was certain that this girl was of the same world as herself. She was not like the other saleswomen. Katherine was certain—and at the same time afraid of being mistaken. It kept her from getting

acquainted with her. She was afraid of finding that, at closer range, a blurred enunciation should betray this paragon's kinship, in spite of appearances, to the rest of their associates; that her little formal ways should prove affectation; her fineness only imitation; and the illusion of the porcelain vase be shattered.

Sometimes Katherine thought the girl was noticing her, too. Sometimes she thought that when she looked at her, the girl's observant scrutiny was almost surprised in the act of flight.

Still, they did not get acquainted. By the end of Katherine's first month in the Ladies' Suits, there was scarcely an employee on the floor with whom she had not exchanged a word or at least a bow, except this one girl. There was an extraordinary reticence between them. They were afraid of getting acquainted—afraid of being disappointed in each other.

(2)

One noon, toward the end of November, on a nasty day, the girls who had box-lunches were eating in the employees' rest-room. Katherine had run out to a near-by pastry-shop and brought in some rolls and an éclair for herself. As she entered the rest-room, loud talking and laughter from the bottom of the room forced itself on her attention. She kept as far away from it as possible. She sat down in a corner, by herself, at the upper end of the room, and broke a roll.

Suddenly, as she was eating and thinking—thinking about Baldie, if the truth must be known, and wondering how he was getting on—a voice, a different voice

from all the rest, rose above all the rest, as a clear flute-note will, at a little distance, be audible above a much greater volume of deeper-toned sound. It was an exquisite voice; a voice Katherine had never before heard; and she knew instantly that it belonged to the Porcelain-Vase girl.

There was hot anger in it, and also unhappiness—the anger and the unhappiness of a creature who is being tormented beyond endurance. It was saying: “Oh, let me alone, please, won’t you?”

Katherine stuffed the broken roll back into the paper-bag, and rose, and sauntered down the room, and joined the excited group at its foot.

The Porcelain-Vase girl was the center of it, at bay, but with no wall to get her back against; for the laughing group, with a sting in the laughter, was pressing her close, all about. Katherine edged into it.

“Sure he means business!” Miss Dalzelle of the Children’s Coats was saying. “You bet your sweet young life he means business! Maxwell don’t come buzzing ’round a girl two days running without he means business!”

“Funny business,” supplemented Miss Ryan, of the Muslin Blouses, tossing her bobbed permanent wave.

The group agreed that it was indeed a funny sort of business that Maxwell was likely to mean when he came buzzing ’round any girl two days running.

Dumb and shamed, the Porcelain-Vase girl faced the talk.

It had been funny business that Maxwell had meant with Bess Malloy—they all remembered about Bess

Malloy; it was six months ago that Bess vanished. She was just out of the hospital, now, was Bess; but she was not coming back to Christie's. There was no place in Christie's for such as Bess, Maxwell's business with her being finished.

Still, Maxwell was open-handed, while he lasted—and a clever girl could make him last a good while—and not a little envy sharpened the sting of the laughter with which Miss Dalzelle and Miss Ryan and the others rallied the Porcelain-Vase girl.

Katherine knew what they were talking about. Yesterday and to-day both, there had been a heavy-set, black-haired, swarthy man leaning over the table, among the chiffon blouses, talking to the Porcelain-Vase girl. He had passed through the suit department, speaking to no one, going straight to his destination; and when he had at last left, he had gone straight away again through the suit department, speaking to no one. He had made no pretence that he had a general interest in Christie's employees. Katherine knew who he was, though she had never come in contact with him. He was Louis Maxwell, junior member of the firm of Christie's.

"Florrie, remember how he used to lean over the counter, eating Bess up with his eyes? Just like he was doing with Miss Viveash this morning!" Miss Ryan appealed to a friend for confirmation of this similarity in Maxwell's attitude to Bess Malloy and Miss Viveash. "Gosh!" she added, with a franker display of her envy, "you're the Million-Dollar Kid of this bunch, all right, Miss Viveash!"

The Porcelain-Vase girl's lashes swept her scarlet cheeks. She had nothing to say. She did not seem to know how to fight in this warfare of innuendo. She seemed near to the shame of tears.

Katherine heard her own voice cut in to the clamor: cool and arrogant.

"Who's this?" she inquired. "Maxwell? Why, that poor boob would talk heart-to-heart to an oyster, if the oyster would listen! I never in all my life saw a man with such an inflated opinion of himself!"

Katherine's voice, the calm, unraised voice of social authority, dominated the noisy group.

"I suppose," suggested Miss Ryan, with a too-polite smile, "that he's been cultivating you, too?"

Katherine sent a little stare in her direction, before she replied contemptuously, "He tried to tell me his great life-history one morning, but I'm not a good listener." . . . She turned to the Porcelain-Vase girl, who had lifted her eyes, and was staring at her with a strange look. "You're too nice to him, Miss Viveash, that's the trouble. Show him what you think of his great life-history next time he comes around, and he won't bother you again. All he wants is a pair of awed eyes to tell him what a great man Maxwell is, that's all. He doesn't care who the eyes belong to!"

"What about Bess Malloy?" retorted Miss Dalzelle, with more than a suspicion of a sneer. She was at no pains to conceal how intensely she disliked Katherine.

"Bess Malloy," replied Katherine crisply, "must have been a little fool."

The group broke up, feeling itself, in some inexplicable manner, routed. Katherine and Miss Viveash were left standing, together.

Every luncheon, after that, they ate together. By the end of the month, they were rooming together at Katherine's boarding-house in a small double-room. Blanche owned a tiny gas-plate; they attached it surreptitiously of a morning to the gas-jet, and got their own breakfast on it. It was a great saving. Sometimes they had a wonderful repast: coffee, scrambled eggs, rolls, jam, and all; more often it was only the hasty cup of coffee. Katherine was in the extraordinary position of seeing her living-expenses reduced at the very moment that her earnings were increased. Every week she put away a little something toward the rainy day.

Blanche was less prosperous. It took every cent of her earnings, every week, to pay her living-expenses and buy what clothes she had to have. There must be, for her, Blanche said, no rainy day! She could not afford it!

(3)

Blanche was not, after all, of Katherine's world. She was a country clergyman's daughter in revolt.

She had come, against all advice, to the city, with the ambition to become some sort of a designer—wall-paper; rugs, perhaps—and had fallen upon hard times

and found refuge and bread-and-butter among Christie's chiffon blouses.

The barrier of pride behind Blanche was to Katherine's as the Chinese Wall to a sand-fort. Katherine might conceivably die rather than admit her failure to the friends she had cut herself off from: Blanche would go through every shame.

"You have simply no idea," said Blanche to Katherine, one Sunday as they stepped out briskly, side by side, in the bracing air of a sunshiny December day, through the Fenway toward Jamaica Pond, "you have simply no *idea* of the way I was brought up! My father is the sweetest, best man that ever breathed; he's almost a saint. And he's the sincerest minister of the Gospel—his idea of the Gospel—that ever spoke from a pulpit. And yet all his life long it's the devil he's been looking at more than God. He's always got his eye on him; as if he was suspicious he might crop up most anywhere any minute. He hasn't the least bit of faith in God! He doesn't think God is anywhere near a match for the devil!

"Give the devil an inch and he's sure to get an ell—that's father's creed, almost! He doesn't dare put the least handicap in all the world on God!" Blanche laughed, but only a little.

"Dancing—that's wicked; and cards—they're unspeakably wicked! Theaters are wicked; movies are wicked; novels are all wicked. And 'most everybody in town (such a wee, stuffy, unventilated little town, Katherine!) thinks the same way father does. Nobody plays cards; and nobody reads novels except a

few that do it on the sly. Once in a while there's somebody bold enough to go down to Curtis Crossing to a dance or the movies; but they do it on the sly. Prayer-meeting and buggy-riding (of course there are some autos, too, now) are about our only amusements. We don't give the devil a single inch if we can help it. And yet"—Blanche became pensive—"it's almost a saying around home that at High School graduation there's always at least one of the girls who can't be present to receive her diploma. It's hardly failed in years. . . . Curious, isn't it?

"Do you know the first thing I did when I got here?" asked Blanche, her gray eyes dancing. "I went to a circus—a *circus!*"

Katherine, who had used to be so bored by Angela's monologues, was never bored by Blanche's. When Blanche talked, the blood flamed beneath her translucent skin; and the pupils of her gray eyes would dilate to great, black moons.

Almost all Blanche's conversation centered about religion. That, and designing—wall-paper, or, perhaps, rugs—seemed to be the only two things she was interested in. Were, apparently, the only things she knew anything about.

After they went to bed at night, Katherine often thought about Blanche, and her burning religiousness, and about Blanche's father, who considered Blanche a heretic, and who despaired of Blanche's ever being "saved," because Blanche could never get a conviction of sin.

Blanche couldn't, simply couldn't, get a conviction of sin.

Blanche had done, of course, she said, quite a number of small, mean things in her life; but nothing really so bad that she could feel God would be awfully upset about them. She used to go in wading in somebody's horse-trough when she was a little girl; and once, when she was eleven, she stole two cents out of the Missionary-Box, and bought some jack-stones with it. It had been on her conscience ever since; but she couldn't get a conviction of sin out of it.

So, as her spiritual condition—her failure to get a conviction of sin—worried her father all the time, Blanche had thought she had better come away.

Blanche's religious talks—her passionate expositions of her own creed and her own God—were always monologues. Katherine took no part in them to make them conversation. Blanche did not seem to expect it. Ardently religious as she was, in her burning revolt from the older dogmas, she never made the slightest assault upon Katherine's soul; never tore its decent garment of reticence from it; never attempted to take it gently by the hand, as it were, and lead it to God. It was as if she tacitly assumed that Katherine's soul was Katherine's exclusive and private business; that the business of Katherine's soul could quite safely be left to God and Life. Blanche, Katherine gathered, had an immense confidence in God and Life and souls.

When Katherine talked, it was again a monologue; a monologue of a different color. She told Blanche long tales of the bubble-world: of picturesque frivol-

ities, of clothes, of the loves, ambitions and malices of Angela, Marie, Bettina.

At such times the great black moons would wax again in Blanche's wide, listening eyes; and the flush of her cheeks would wane to the pallor of intenser excitement.

To-day Katherine had been weaving such a tale. They had reached the summit of the Arboretum as it drew to its conclusion. And suddenly Blanche, who had been listening a long, long time, flung open her arms in a gesture of amazing abandon and cried, "Oh, that is Life! . . . And I have never had it—not even a taste of it. . . . But I shall have it!"

(4)

Maxwell was a short, thick-set bull of a man, red-faced and black-jowled, with wrists as hairy and black as a baboon's. Feminine blondness and fragility might conceivably attract him.

As the days passed, and he was seen more and more frequently hanging over the table of chiffon blouses, and the other girls lifted more and more significant eyebrows at the sight, and tongues wagged less and less pleasantly, Katherine thought that Blanche herself was becoming a little anxious.

Blanche, however, open as she was about her ideas of life and God, was chary with her personal confidences. Once she deserted Katherine and went to luncheon with Mr. Maxwell—so much she told Katherine; but what they talked about, she did not say. Later, too, she went out to dinner with him. He met

her in a high-powered car, and they rushed down to the South Shore.

She told Katherine, afterward, the name of the roadhouse to which they had gone, and on whose broad and festive piazza they had dined. Katherine shook her head disapprovingly. She did not know anything definite against the place, but she was under the impression that a faint mist of ill-repute clung about its name.

Blanche laughed: the black moons grew full. "Well, it may not be life with a capital L, Kitty, but it's something! And I've never had anything—anything!"

She chattered excitedly till two o'clock, telling Katherine all about the grand things they had to eat, and the people they saw, the clothes, the manners, the two girls who took too many high-balls and began picking geranium-blooms from the flower-boxes and sticking them in their escorts' hair. She told Katherine also about the cocktail she had tasted and found nasty.

"Well, I wouldn't learn to drink cocktails, anyway," said Katherine, decidedly. "It's all right to dare give the devil an inch, but I wouldn't downright *invite* him to take the ell!"

"No, I suppose I'd better not," replied Blanche, soberly. . . . "But, oh, Kitty, isn't it glorious—the rush through the night-air—well, you know! You've had things!"

"Yes, I have." Katherine said it abruptly; and turned her face to the wall.

Katherine was worried. It was the first time in her life, so far as she could remember, that she had ever been worried. True, when she was out of work, and almost out of money, she had been perturbed about her affairs; almost discouraged, in fact; but that was different from this. Katherine had always a large reserve fund of self-reliance to draw on; and she could see, looking back, that even at the lowest ebb of her courage, this subconscious sense of her ability to pull through somehow had never really deserted her.

But now it was different. This was Blanche's affair; and Katherine had not quite the confidence in Blanche's ability to pull through it that she would have had in herself. Katherine had her temptations; but since the time she had learned her hard lesson, she never forgot where her own interests lay. She would never play into any man's hand again!

The bait that Maxwell was throwing out for Blanche, moreover, would never attract Katherine. To Blanche it glittered like a red-gold and green-gold miracle in the sun: to Katherine, whose life, from seventeen to twenty-three, had been crowded with just such spinning, bobbing, shiny, tiresome toys, there was no miracle about them.

But Blanche? Katherine was worried. Naturally, to a girl who had been denied every normal, healthy pleasure of youth, the lure of the world and the flesh was irresistible. Blanche's father, the unwise Apostle of a deformed Gospel, had been the devil's best ally. The keen old saying about minister's sons and deacon's daughters had not grown out of nothing. The sins

of the fathers—sins of stupidity, sins of unlovely egotism, sins against nature—are still visited upon the children. The sin of Blanche's sweet and saintly father was about to be visited on her. Blanche was abnormal. Her father, thinking he knew better than Nature, had tried to make a different manner of creature of her from what Nature had planned—and he had succeeded. He was like the ancient Chinese, who took a live young baby and shut it up to grow in a goblin-shaped vase, thus imposing on it the form and features they preferred to Nature's.

Blanche, starved by the dullness of twenty years, had come to the city ravenous for what she called Life. When she came, she meant, by Life, the designing of wall-papers or, perhaps, rugs; the encountering of the Prince; and a wooing that should outshine dreams.

Katherine had started the harm by telling the long tales of the bubble-world. They had, alarmingly, given Blanche a new, eagerly-seized-upon definition of Life.

Maxwell seemed about to complete the harm by offering Blanche the bubble-world in a champagne-glass. Life—offered to one in a champagne-glass!

Champagne on an empty stomach is bad. And Blanche, as she declared so passionately, had never had even a taste of Life.

(5)

Long after Katherine thought Blanche was asleep,

the voice from her cot spoke up tremulously, wistfully: "If only ——"

"If only what, Blanche?" asked Katherine, gently.

"If only—he were different—and—not married."

(6)

Two days later, Blanche was discharged.

"But why, Blanche, why?" cried Katherine, incredulously. For an instant, she did not connect Mr. Louis Maxwell with this pleasant event.

Blanche flushed slowly till her fair face was dark, dahlia-red.

"Because," she said.

Katherine understood.

She was aghast and furious. At the same time something went through her like singing. Blanche had conquered!

Aloud she only said: "Cheer up! You'll have another place in no time!"

"I don't know about that," replied Blanche, gloomily.

"Stuff! Of course you will! Look at me—without experience or reference!"

"It's easier to get a job without any experience than with experience in a place from which you can't get a recommendation."

"Oh, the cowards!" said Katherine.

Blanche shrugged her shoulders. "Who is De-Schamm, to go against the will of the Mighty Maxwell!"

"I wish *I* were DeSchamm for just half an hour!" said Katherine.

"And if you were you'd lose your job in that half hour."

"All right! Then I'd lose my job! But at least I'd have the satisfaction of losing it like a man!"

"But he couldn't feed the little DeSchamms on *that*."

They were both silent for a while.

"You see,"—Blanche's thoughts had gone on by leaps,—"Fate has it in for me! She has given me just a second's glimpse of Life—just the briefest, tormenting glimpse—and then stuck it away behind a grating."

"Well, anyhow, you aren't going to bruise yourself against the grating," said Katherine.

"Who knows?" said Blanche. . . . "You see," she continued, steadily, "what the investigators, what the statisticians don't perceive, when they talk about a 'living-wage,' is that food and shelter and a decent covering for the body are not all that is necessary to life. We're young! We *need* pleasure, we *need* pretty clothes, and a young man or two around. They aren't luxuries! They're the necessities of our age! The wage that doesn't let us have any of them—not a speck of pleasure—nothing to fix ourselves up pretty with—no young men, men different from Maxwell—is not a living-wage! It's a criminal wage! It's a wage that crowds us into the place where we must starve—or steal!"

Katherine was frightened. She was glad that she

had been flourishing like a green bay-tree and that she had something laid away for a rainy day: for it looked as if it were going to be a very rainy day indeed for Blanche.

(7)

It was. For a week she looked for work, but she got none.

"I'm leaving you, Kitty," she said, finally.

And leave she did; one day while Katherine was away at work, since the latter would not let her go when she was there.

Katherine found a brief note from her, giving her new address, and saying, for the rest: "I don't want to lose you, Kitty; but I can't graft."

Katherine hunted her up at once. She found her in a "side-room" of indescribable squalor. It opened off the fourth-floor hall of a filthy lodging-house. It was scarcely larger than a good-sized closet, and it had no window. It contained three articles of furniture: a cot-bed, a wash-stand which stank, and a crippled chair. The wash-stand stood at the head of the bed, and was furnished forth with a tin wash-bowl, a cracked-nosed pitcher, a soap-dish with the remains of a dirty cake adhering obstinately to its inner sides, a chinaware mug, and a kerosene lamp with a smoked and broken chimney. In the door were two long, rusty nails and a hook. These were to accommodate Blanche's wardrobe, and they did so. Over the wash-stand hung a match-safe, a crocheted "hair-receiver" and a comic match-scratcher depicting the back-view of a farmer done in sand-paper with the legend

"Scratch my back," to which some former occupant of the room had scrawled a humorous addition.

The touch of unconscious irony was supplied by a colored print entitled "Home" which was held, somewhat askew, by two tacks, on the wall opposite the foot of the bed.

No one but a hod-carrier could have existed in such a room, for two reasons: first, because it was unventilated day or night, and the stench of the whole dreadful house seemed to filter into it and lodge there, accumulating vapor upon vapor; and second, because it was alive with bedbugs.

Blanche, however, said she was going to exist there. Smells and bedbugs couldn't vanquish *her*! It wasn't a very pretty room; but even it was more than she could possibly afford.

"Well," said Katherine, "I don't suppose I can take you back by force——" ("You can't!" interpolated Blanche.) "But I haven't given up our room, and I'm not going to. I shall keep it on; and when you get ready to come back, it will be there, and so shall I!"

Blanche did not come back, however. She got work, finally. It was a job of sewing buttons on men's bargain-sale trousers in what was, in all but name, a sweat-shop.

Whatever may be said of the amplitude of Christie's wages, there is no room for argument about that of the sweat-shop. It is not a living-wage. Nobody ever claims that it is. Blanche, attempting to live on it, was slowly starving to death before Katherine's eyes.

Katherine stormed and protested in vain. She met a will as obstinate, and a barrier of pride more insurmountable, than her own.

She went to see Blanche every evening; and every evening it seemed to her that Blanche was visibly worse in health. A sallow tinge had obscured her fairness; her great eyes were sunken, and deep purple circles around them made them ghastly; her eyeballs were yellowish; she was becoming scarcely more than skin and bone and nerves that twitched.

She would not accept money from Katherine; she would not accept food. Her independence was more passionate, more disastrous than Katherine's own.

Besides, she said, Katherine could not keep two on her earnings; and that was of course true.

(8)

February at last came in: a mild, relaxing, treacherous February. It was bad weather for Blanche. Often now, when Katherine came, she found Blanche in bed, and left early, so that, if possible, Blanche could get a little sleep before the regiments of bed-bugs mustered and marched upon her.

One evening, however, Blanche detained her.

Katherine sat on the side of the bed, and Blanche laid her transparent hand on Katherine's strong brown one.

"I've been asleep already, Katherine," she said, in her weakened voice. "I've been dreaming. . . ."

The terror of her dreams was still upon her. She

wanted to talk about them; to share the terror of them. . . .

As Katherine listened, the flesh crawled on her spine.

"This settles it!" she cried suddenly. "Something is going to be done! If you won't agree to it, then it shall be done by force!"

Blanche looked steadily at Katherine.

"If you write my people ——" she began.

"I shan't write your people," interrupted Katherine, shortly. "I'm not a fool. . . . But I shall do *something!*"

Blanche's eyes closed. "You can't do," she said, "anything, Kitty."

"I shall do something," reiterated Katherine. "And right now I'm going to stroke your head till you go to sleep."

After a long time, under the ministrations of Katherine's hand, Blanche's breathing became faint, but regular. The starts and twitchings of her limbs grew less frequent, then ceased. She was asleep.

Katherine blew out the light, and tiptoed from the room.

She went home, and tried to go to bed; but the terror of Blanche's dreams would not leave her, even in sleep. All night long she was haunted by a wailing—the wailing of the lonely gull over the lonely sea of Blanche's dream; by the rushing of black water over hidden rocks; by the ebb and flow and splash of surf in a dim cavern. All night long she was trying to get away from the Thing that jumped out on her from

behind doors and buildings and trees. Then she found her car, miraculously, and she was driving like the wind along a dreary country road, getting away. Then suddenly her heart stopped beating. There, on the hood of her car perched, like a great bird, the very Thing from which she was running; and through its mufflings she divined its eyes upon her, and the featureless horror of its leer. Blanche's dreams had become her own.

In consequence, the next morning she overslept, and had to hurry into her clothes, and away to the store without any breakfast.

Once outside the house, she perceived that the weather, so unseasonably mild and spring-like the day before, had changed abruptly to a wintry temperature; but she had no time to go back for a heavier wrap.

By noon she had a sore throat and a headache. She did not go out for any luncheon, but lay down in the rest-room. When it came time to go back to her duties in the suit-department, she could not move.

About three o'clock, the store-nurse came, and, after taking her pulse and temperature and inspecting her throat, gave her a little envelope of pills and sent her home, telling her by no means to report the next morning. Christie's was very properly cautious about sore throats.

The next morning she was worse, and felt no temptation to get up. Her landlady came in to see her, made her some tea and toast, and promised to see that a brief note which she had scrawled to Blanche,

explaining why she could not come to see her that evening, should be safely placed in a letter-box.

Ultimately she had to have a doctor, who pronounced it tonsillitis. She was in bed for five days, and confined to her room the rest of the week.

And all this time, not a word from Blanche.

Katherine was more than worried, and the first day that she was allowed out, she hurried straight from work to Blanche's room.

It was vacant.

Blanche's little old-fashioned trunk, locked, stood outside the door.

The miserable sexless creature who kept the house told Katherine that Blanche had that day given up her room, and that she had left directions for her trunk to go in the morning to the address printed on the tag.

(9)

Katherine looked at the address. It bore the name of a pretentious apartment-house in a none too reputable neighborhood.

"Have you a pencil?" asked Katherine.

The poor creature, clucking with concentration, produced the stub of one from its rags. Katherine, with strong black strokes, crossed off the name of the apartment-house, and substituted her own address.

"Where is Miss Viveash now?" she asked.

The lodging-house keeper did not know. A gentleman came for her about five o'clock in a big limousine, and she went away with him.

What did the gentleman look like?

A hairy man, he was.

Katherine added a few details, describing Mr. Louis Maxwell. Did the gentleman look like that? Yes, ma'am, that was him. Katherine produced a coin which changed hands without much ado; then she hurried out onto the street.

Blanche had given in. Maxwell had got her. A sob surprised Katherine.

Then suddenly she shook her head, as if she were shaking back a heavy mane. Not for nothing was she the daughter of Richard Howard, a faulty husband and father, but a fighter! Not for nothing was she the daughter of Belle Ansella Hicks, a fighter, too!

For the first time in seven months, she hailed a taxi. She gave the address that she had crossed off Blanche's trunk-tag.

The apartment indicated was dark. The gentleman and lady who had taken it were not expected till the following day. She could have killed the janitor for his knowing leer.

Instead, she produced a dollar bill, and asked him if he knew where she could get in touch with the gentleman on the 'phone. It was urgent. (Inspiration came to her.) A message had come for him after he left the office which he must have at once.

The janitor looked dubious; but a dollar bill is a great dissolver of doubts. The gentleman had left a telephone number where, under the name of Thomas Smith, he was to be called in case a certain telegram came here for him.

Thank God for the occasional coincidence!

Katherine copied the number carefully, thanked the janitor, parted with the dollar bill—her last unbroken one—and hastened to a telephone-booth at the nearest drug-store. It required but a few minutes and a little verbal diplomacy to verify her suspicions. The telephone number was the number of the house on the South Shore.

Katherine peered through the glass of the booth door at the drug-store clock.

Six-thirty. They would be just ordering dinner about now. It would take a half hour or so to get it. Then an hour to eat from cocktails to champagne. There was time yet—in a high-powered car.

For a moment she tapped thoughtfully on the shelf; then she called a number.

"Can you give me Mr. Archibald Daggett's address?.....Thank you.....Can I reach him by 'phone, do you know?.....I can?.....Thank you."

In less than two minutes, she had reached him, and was saying in a voice that vibrated with something beside excitement, "Hello, Baldie; this is Katherine. Yes—Kat. Listen, Baldie. Can you borrow a high-powered car at once and meet me? I'm sorry if you're right in the middle of dinner—this is S. O. S.—you know I wouldn't call you for anything short of——.....Yes." She gave the location of the drug-store. "I'll be on the sidewalk. Every minute counts. Don't stop even to put on a clean collar. I'll explain. Twenty minutes—good."

(10)

It was a small and innocent-looking house. Little gables, white, with green shutters, peered out over the wide glassed-in verandah that enclosed it below. It fronted on a neat lawn, dotted with shrubbery, and cut by a semicircular driveway, graveled and edged with white pebbles.

It was, however, the off season for these places along the shore. The drive was too bleak. Only one little table in the heated verandah with its summery flower-boxes was occupied, and that not by the couple whom Katherine was seeking.

There were, however, two cars ahead of Baldie's, parked beside the driveway. . . .

Once within the house, Baldie began to look mortally uneasy. He glanced at the naive, white-balustered, cheerfully-carpeted little staircase; he glanced at Katherine, who had casually announced her intention—for the benefit of an obsequious waiter—of going up to take off her wraps and powder her nose.

"Kat," he whispered, "I can't let you do it. I can't let you go up there. You don't know ——"

"I do know. And you can't keep me. Blanche is up there and I am going to get her. You won't get frightened and spoil things by interfering, Baldie?"

"If you feel you must do it, Kat, I'll stand by. I won't butt in—as long as nothing goes flooey with your plans. Don't get frightened! You know nothing can really happen to you. I could hear a scream from any room in this little place."

"You won't hear any screams!" She smiled.
"There are no screams in my plan."

The waiter, coming forward again as Katherine withdrew, obviously thought it entirely natural that the lady should go up-stairs to the ladies' room to remove her wraps, and that the gentleman should wish to wait to order the dinner till she should come down. It seemed quite natural to him, also, that the gentleman should wish dinner served in a certain cozy little private dining-room that opened off the entrance-hall on the opposite side from the main dining-room. And he quite understood the language of the yellow-backed bill which Baldie handed him as he remarked, after having been made free of the little dining-room, "Oh, and by the way—George! When we're ready to order, I'll ring."

"Yes, sir."

The waiter bowed and discreetly withdrew to some distant region in the rear of the house. It was the off-season. Yellow-backed bills were rare, and correspondingly precious. It was none of his business how long a time should elapse before the gentleman and lady got ready to order dinner.

As for Baldie, left alone in the hall, at the foot of the stairs—he pulled out his watch and looked at it. At the end of eight minutes he was to go out and make ready for instant departure. At ten minutes he was to start his engine. If nothing had happened by the end of twelve minutes, he was to toot his horn savagely. And again at fifteen minutes.

"Yes, and by gum, if nothing has happened by

then," said Baldie, grimly, to himself, "there's going to be a nice little personally-conducted raid of these here premises—by a posse of one."

Three minutes. Silence reigned in the front of the house. It might have been deserted, for all the signs of human occupancy it showed. Four minutes. He could hear his watch tick. Five minutes. As deep a silence seemed to hold the floors above. He strained his ears, in vain. Not a sound. Not a footfall. Not the echo of a voice. Six minutes.

What was happening up there? Where was Katherine?

Eight minutes.

Beads of perspiration stood out on Baldie's brow. He looked irresolutely up the stairs.

Then, like a good soldier, whose first virtue is obedience, he went out to his car.

(11)

He tooted his horn—savagely.

Thirteen minutes. Fourteen.

Then he saw them coming, across the glassed-in verandah, walking hastily and lightly: a heavy-shouldered, scowling man half-carrying, half-dragging a girl wrapped in a fur cloak; and Katherine, her face shining with triumph. Baldie sprang into the driver's seat, threw out the clutch, laid his hand on the gear-shift. His engine was already running.

The three came rapidly out of the verandah and across the driveway to the side of the car.

Katherine opened the door of the tonneau. The

man, who, Baldie knew, must be Maxwell, half-lifted, half-flung the bareheaded, fair-haired girl in the fur coat into the car. Katherine sprang in after her and put her arms about her.

Baldie trod on the accelerator.

"I suppose you know," snarled Maxwell, looking at Katherine, across Blanche, "that you'll pay for this?"

"Get out of the road, you cur!" shouted Baldie.

"Let's go, Baldie!" said Katherine, clearly and quietly.

Reluctantly the car roared, plunged forward, shot into the dark.

For ten minutes it rocked and leaped along the uncertain road; then it slowed down; stopped.

Baldie took his hands from the wheel, drew out a handkerchief, mopped his face and neck.

He turned around.

The girl Blanche, slumped over sidewise, her head in Katherine's lap, her body held firm by Katherine's arm, was asleep. Across her, Katherine smiled warmly at Baldie.

"You did wonderfully, Baldie," she said. "It was no time for a fight."

"Gosh, but I wish I had pasted him one—just one—right on his dirty jaw," growled Baldie.

"No," said Katherine. "That would have meant a row—the whole place roused—perhaps police—and the whole thing in the papers. And then Blanche *would* be done for."

"You're a darn good friend, Kat," said Baldie.

"I have a good friend, too," retorted Katherine.

"You were splendid, Baldie! To come right forward on the minute—at my S. O. S.—after all these months—and do everything just the way I said ——"

"Mm!" grunted Baldie.

"I was in time," said Katherine, quietly.

She began to laugh. "Oh, how wild—how simply raging—Maxwell will be to-morrow, when he gets the high-balls out of his head and realizes he was bluffed—bluffed!—*bluffed!*—by one lone young woman without a single card up her sleeve! Blanche was determined not to come away with me. I made him carry her. Carry her!"

She grew breathless with laughing. "And, to add to it, bluffed by a saleswoman out of his own store—whose fortunes, as one might say, he holds in the hollow of his hand!"

Baldie started the car gently.

"Yeah," he said. "That's just what's worrying me—that fortunes-in-the-hollow-of-his-hand stuff. Does he know you by sight, Kat?"

"Oh, yes," said Katherine, carelessly, "he knows who I am.—You tooted the horn at just the right instant, Baldie. He wasn't quite decided, till then.—Oh, yes, he knows who I am all right. But who's afraid of Maxwell!"

Baldie did not reply.

(12)

They drove a long way home, for Katherine did not wish to reach the boarding-house till after the hall lights should have been put out, and everybody was

abed. She did not wish anyone to see Blanche carried in.

It was a long, wonderful ride through the silent night, along a vast shadowy shore where a full tide whispered and softly plashed.

Katherine, holding Blanche in her arms, thought of many things; and the thought mingled with the wonder of the night. She thought of Maxwell, and of Blanche, and of what she had saved Blanche from. She thought of Paolo; and her heart cried to the night, in revolt, the woman's age-old question: "Are all men like that?"

And the night only answered with the whisper and splash of the full tide on the shadowy shore.

Her heart answered its own question. "No! They're not all like that! There's Baldie."

Her heart, unaccountably sang.

CHAPTER XIV

RESURRECTION

(1)

BALDIE carried Blanche into the dark house and up the staircase along an empty hall, and into the room she had formerly shared with Katherine. He laid her down, still wrapped in the coat, in her old cot-bed. Her body sank limply into the hollow of mattress and pillows, completely abandoned to stertorous slumber.

"Well," said Baldie, in an awkward whisper, "I guess you're all right now. . . . Do you think she needs a doctor?"

"No. I want to thank you, Baldie. You've been a trump!"

"Oh—rats!" muttered Baldie, embarrassed.

Still he did not go.

They moved softly to the window, and stood there, side by side, looking out. They could see down into a small back yard with a small, bare tree in it, and ghostly clothes, stiff with frost, hanging on a ghostly line. Everything was bathed in a queer, phosphorescent glow. It was a night for whispering.

Baldie and Katherine felt wrapped in a peaceful langour: the delicious relaxation of every nerve and fibre at the cessation of immense, daring effort and

exalting triumph. They were intimately conscious of happiness in each other's proximity. They had been partners in a great undertaking and a great achievement: the sense of their partnership had not yet left either of them.

Baldie broke out impetuously—with as much impetuosity as a whisper will carry—"Look here, Kat, you're not going to shut me off again, are you? I tell you, I can't stand it! . . . Especially now, after that—that cur's threats. I'd be worrying my head off, wondering if —— I can't stand it, Kat, and I'm not going to! You've got to let me stand by, now!"

Katherine, taken by a sudden weakness, leaned against the window-frame. She looked, in the pale glow, wraith-like. But she shook her head.

"Got to stand on my own feet, thank you, Baldie!"

"Oh—*listen*, Kat ——!"

"Sh! Please!"

("Oh, *doggone* this whispering—like a thief!") He whispered: "I'm getting thirty a week now. I've heard on good authority that next month I'm to be raised to fifty. I'm making good, and working like a dog. The old man's pleased. I'm only telling you this to show you I'm not such a cad as to ask you to marry me if I didn't have prospects. Lots of the men at the factory are married, on as little or less than I'm getting now. It'd mean you'd have to do the housework for a year or two; but, Kat, it wouldn't, it couldn't be so much worse than this! And it would give me the right, that I haven't got now, to stand by you, all the time, night and day."

Katherine stared at him curiously. It was hard for her to believe in the unselfishness of any man—even Baldie—where a woman was concerned. Still her logical mind perceived either that his speech must indicate great unselfishness or a great desire for her: since he was ready to make such a material sacrifice as his marriage just now would entail, either to protect her or to possess her.

Which was the real subconscious motive? The first was hard to believe in; but the second, when she scrutinized his earnest eyes, bent upon her, his grim jaw, his capable hands, seemed a downright insult. Baldie might have strong passions, probably did have, but he was not one to be, like Davis Vaughn, dominated by the sex-passion to the exclusion of reason, common-sense, and sane self-interest. Still, some devil in her, spawn of Paolo's teachings, could not forbear making a test.

"Well," she said, carefully, "I don't know that I ought to force it to be a choice, for you, between not seeing me at all or marrying me. . . . It would be hard, anyway, after to-night, to go back to the old lonesome way. . . . I must work out my own salvation to the finish. I've hardly made a beginning yet. Still, we shall keep in touch. . . . So you can stand by."

"But I have to leave you now," said Baldie. "If we were married, I wouldn't have to."

The skeptical devil, spawn of Paolo's teachings, smiled at this speech, and dared Katherine to press the test.

It was a bad moment for pressing any tests. The ghostly, whispering night shut her and Baldie together, alone in the sleeping house. The air seemed surcharged with a disturbing electricity. Never again could they be just human beings together, she and Baldie. Blanche's experience, in which they had vicariously participated, had destroyed their innocence. Katherine was conscious of a nervous difficulty in articulating the words of her test: "Suppose I should say that you needn't leave me now. That you could stay."

"But you wouldn't say that!" retorted Baldie, bluntly. "You're not that kind of a girl."

She winced, almost as if she had made the suggestion and been rebuffed. Then she said, sombrely, "How do you know what kind of a girl I am?"

"Oh, I know *that!*" said Baldie, with a sort of calm confidence that smote her. "What I don't know—yet—is, Are you going to marry me?"

Outside, just opposite the window, she saw Paolo's face. It floated bodiless in the phosphorescent mystery of the night—the slight wise smile—the narrowed eyelids——

"You can't marry him," said the smile. "You *daren't!*"

That one illicit act which she thought buried in the sepulchre of Things-Past-and-Done-With, cut off cleanly, as the buried dead are cut off, from all meddling with the Living Present, rose up in its grave-clothes: a sinister thing; a thing to be reckoned with. . . .

"I'm sorry, Baldie," she said. "I appreciate your asking me, very, very much indeed. It's a fine thing to do. But I can't—take advantage of it. It wouldn't be right."

"Why not?"

"Oh, Baldie, I'm not the kind of a girl it's worth making such a sacrifice for. I'm not," she continued, miserably, "the kind of a girl you think, at all."

"Is that a noble slosh of sentiment," demanded Baldie, suspiciously, "or do you really mean something definite?"

"Very definite," said Katherine.

Baldie, with a sudden convulsive movement, wiped his forehead—the gesture of a factory-worker—with the back of his hand.

"Don't string it out, Kat!" he whispered. "Come clean!"

She came clean. She gave him the ugly fact, bare of any detail, denuded of all personality.

There was a short pause.

Then—"Oh, if *that's* all——" he dismissed it. "You're still a hundred times too good for me, Kat. I'm only the more determined now to take you away from all this—this *muck* of a life where a girl hasn't a chance—— *Damn* such a social system!"

"Oh, Baldie, Baldie," interrupted Katherine, "you don't understand at all. It wasn't since I went to work. It was before."

"I don't believe it!"

"You must believe it. You do believe it."

His mind went back, searching —— He shut off its search abruptly.

“Well, anyway ——” he said. “That makes no difference now.”

It was the hour when vitality is at its lowest ebb—the unreality of everything—that strange, luminous quality of the outer night—the nervous exhaustion of the evening’s adventure—the omission of dinner—the weakness from her recent illness—that made Katherine tremble from head to foot.

“But that’s just what it does, Baldie,” she replied, biting off the syllables to keep her teeth from chattering. “You see—you don’t—realize. When a thing like that has happened—once—it is never done with. Unless you should lose your memory.” Baldie made an inarticulate sound. “I wouldn’t dare marry you—I wouldn’t *dare*—I’d be afraid—of not being able to put the—thought of him out of my mind.”

“Then, for God’s sake, girl,” said Baldie, slowly, “if you cared that way, why didn’t you marry him?”

“Marry ——? He never ——” she stopped, staring at Baldie. She realized what had happened. He thought that it had been Davis; and that, to him, excused her a little. “Oh, Baldie, you see you don’t realize at all. It wasn’t Davis Vaughn. And I didn’t ‘care’ in any way that you are thinking of. It was Paul Grayson.”

“No! Not that little, slimy ——” His voice was hoarse, unrecognizable, tortured unendurably. It cried out against the intolerable illumination which that name cast. At last Baldie understood.

There was a dreadful silence. He showed in vague outlines an elbow propped against the wall; hand shading eyes. Katherine was terror-stricken at what she had done. She had not dreamed he would take it so hard. Her own emotions had been what she was chiefly concerned with: gratitude for Baldie's splendid unselfishness; the fateful impulse, born of her mood and the night's mood, to "come clean," to meet his generosity with complete honesty. She had not visualized his attitude at all. It had not occurred to her that he would have any attitude. It came to her that there is such a thing as love, the sort of love she and Paolo (she aping Paolo) had scoffed at: a passion even more essentially of the spirit than of the body; and that Baldie had this love for her. This thing—this love in him—was making him suffer. Nothing else could account for it. Paolo would not have cared if she had told him she had had a dozen lovers. In a way he would have been glad: it would have eased what little conscience he had in the matter.

She was awed by Baldie's suffering. He had been so generous . . . and, in return, she had hurt him; a frightful, unpremeditated hurt. It had been so totally unpremeditated: that fact formed part of her awe now. It had never before occurred to her that that act of hers had concerned anybody but herself; that anybody but herself would have to reckon with it. And now she perceived that at the moment when she had committed it, she had dealt this blow to the man who should afterward love her. . . .

Baldie dragged his hand across his eyes, casually;

like a boy ashamed of squeezed-out tears on the lashes. He dropped his elbow, squared his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "you should have let me take better care of you—seeing there was no one else to do it. . . . I ought to have done it anyway. . . . I'm going to marry you, too. The only thing that could possibly prevent it would be if you married somebody else."

"Well, I shan't do that—you may be sure," said Katherine, smiling wanly.

"Well, I must go," said Baldie. "It's late."

There was a moment's hesitation; then they shook hands, with a firm, brief grip.

Baldie turned away, tiptoed blunderingly toward the door.

Half-way across the room he stopped. His back, she could see that much in the dark, was toward her.

"Kat," he said, "tell me one thing. . . . Do you still care—for—him?"

Katherine stared out at the night. In that night hung the same face; the same eyes, smiling tolerantly, observed, benevolently, her passionate struggles to be free of its domination. The face seemed to nod, slowly, almost imperceptibly; as she had so often seen Paolo nod when she had raised her eyes to him with a furtive question in them as to whether he was going to get his will with her. And suddenly it occurred to her that Paolo might sometime come back——

"I never cared," she said, slowly; her eyes on that floating face. "He just had a power—that compelled

me. If you mean, would he still have that power? I don't know. I think not. But—how can I know?"

She did know. When she met those eyes the other side of the glass, and felt her nerves and blood answer that smile, and felt his power across seven thousand miles, she knew.

"Thank you, Kat," said Baldie, quietly.

He made his way to the door.

At the door he paused again.

"Good-night," he said. "I'll call up to-morrow and find out how everything is going."

She could hear him trying to make no noise along the hall and down the stairs. Faintly, but decisively, the front door closed; then she could hear his footsteps, released from caution, echoing on the sidewalk.

It was done—like a dream. It was all like a dream—the whole wild adventure. . . . Had any of it really happened?

From a dark corner, the heavy breathing of unhappy Blanche in her cot vouched for the reality of everything.

Baldie loved her. And she had hurt him.

Still she was glad she had told him, even though it had hurt him. The thing to be sorry for, if anything, was the initial act, not the confession.

It was a strange, an appalling thing (the volunteering of such a confession); still, she was not sorry—no! At least she and Baldie had a working-basis, now, for whatever their friendship might ripen into. There is no absolutely practical working-basis for any vital relation but truth. . . .

(2)

She undressed—dutifully mindful of the morrow's responsibilities—and went to bed. But she was too stimulated to fall asleep. She could not get Baldie's question out of her head. She had never "cared"; not in any important sense; but—would she still be in danger—if Paolo should return? Would his hands still make plastic clay of her, to the mockery of her struggles of will and good judgment?

It was unthinkable! She had changed. She was conscious of a change in herself. Over a new, changed Katherine, Paolo would have no power.

Or was she changed—fundamentally? Could people really change—deeper down than the surface? The waves are blown up or subside; but the tides and the depths are unchanged.

Dr. Abrams—she grasped eagerly at the recollection—believed she could change. Had Dr. Abrams been right: were work and "a decent interest in someone else" reshaping her character to something stronger and finer? Was this what Blanche would call "God's Providence": that, out of the ceaseless haphazard thumping of life and the monotonous spinning of days some definite result should, incredibly, emerge?

(3)

In at the open window stole the little fog-ghosts, impalpable till they were thick in the room, inaudible till their combined voices merged in a whispering—whispering——

Little ghosts of little dead deeds . . . volup-

tuous little ghosts . . . shameful little ghosts . . . little ghosts lickerish for life . . . trying to suck life from the dark image of Maxwell and the high wildness of Blanche.

The little ghosts, at last, were bloated, by their sucking, with the very blood and marrow of life. They were warm and drowsy. They tormented the woman who hoped she had changed. *The waves are blown up or subside; but the tides and the depths are unchanged.*

"Decidedly," said Katherine to herself, in the morning, grimly, "I did well to refuse Baldie."

(4)

The rescue of Blanche had been a matter of thrilling moments: the rehabilitation of Blanche was a matter of tedious, disheartening months. Blanche was completely disorganized, physically, nervously, mentally, morally.

If it had been merely a physical breakdown, she could have been placed in the free ward of a city hospital. But Blanche, in her delicate moral state, could not be entrusted to the perfunctory care of undergraduate nurses and indifferent internes. Neither could she be given into the hands of some charitable Home where they would wrestle with her in prayer. Blanche could not be trusted to anyone less tactful, Katherine felt, than herself.

Meanwhile, Blanche's moral condition was obviously rooted in her physical condition of general debility—the work of starvation and bad air and vermin. Moral

recuperation must be based on physical recuperation; and physical recuperation demanded quarts and quarts of the best milk per day, dozens and dozens of eggs fresh enough to be taken raw, tonics, fresh air, gentle exercise under friendly supervision, mild but beguiling diversion for the mind. And all these items, every single one of them, cost money; even fresh air—for the overbreathed air in the streets about the boarding-house was not fresh; it had lost its tonic qualities. Everything that Blanche imperatively needed cost money; and Katherine was short of money and getting shorter.

She was no longer an employee of Christie's.

Anticipating discharge, she had gone early to work the day after her expedition to the South Shore, determined to see Mr. DeSchamm first thing; and, if possible, to head off Louis Maxwell's vengeance.

But Maxwell's vengeance was swifter than she had anticipated. Her discharge was instantaneous upon her arrival. She was not allowed to go up to her place in the suit-department; she was not allowed time to take off her hat in social converse with any other employee of Christie's. As she entered the employees' door, she was handed the notice of her dismissal, together with an envelope containing a week's pay.

She asked to be permitted to see Mr. DeSchamm. Mr. DeSchamm, she was told, was busy.

That was all. It was very simple. Katherine was dismissed, and Mr. DeSchamm was busy.

So Katherine and Blanche were subsisting on Katherine's rainy-day hoard; and, though Blanche was not

getting the milk and eggs and tonics, the hoard was melting daily—almost hourly—away.

All day long, Blanche sat in a chair by the window of their room and brooded or dozed; and all night long she lay awake in her cot.

Once it had seemed to Katherine that there was a light inside Blanche that shone through—shone through as if she were a translucent thing—the translucent envelope of a white flame. Now the light had gone out.

For Blanche had at last got a conviction of sin.

She had made a bargain with Maxwell. She had sold herself to him. She had become a Magdalen. The mere fact that the deal had been blocked was a purely fortuitous circumstance. It did not affect the moral aspects of the case at all. The conviction of sin weighed upon her. It had quenched the high, brave flame of her. It had sunk her, up to the eyes, in the perception only of her flesh, of her foulness. It was in a fair way of running her into a melancholia.

She talked. All the time that Katherine was there, she talked. And all her talk was sodden with despair and moral surrender. Her conviction of sin dominated all the workings of her mind, bestriding it triumphantly, malignly, like the Old Man of the Sea. Sometimes Blanche's futile talk wore Katherine's patience to a thread; sometimes her fighting-heart was torn in pieces by the tragedy of it all.

If Blanche could only divide the responsibility! If she would only give a little of it to her father, and a little to her temperament, some to the side-room, and

much to the starved tissues of her body,—then she might be able to deal with what was left! But Blanche, inheritor of the stern New England conscience without being inheritor of its compensating assurance of salvation by faith in a dogma, would not divide any of the responsibility. She insisted on carrying it all herself; or, rather, she insisted on being crushed under the full weight of it.

Katherine could not reach her. Blanche was so conscious of the moral gulf between them. She was constantly reminding Katherine of it. She shrank from the casual touch of Katherine's hands, the casual contact of Katherine's body. When Katherine despairingly exhorted her to moral effort, tried to stimulate her by encouragement to rally her forces and win out, Blanche would reply only by a shake of the head. When Katherine pressed the point, urging upon her that all was not lost, that, even in spite of the moral slip, she could yet make good with herself, if she would, Blanche's reply was always the same: "Ah, but, you see, you don't know!"

And in the face of that reply, Katherine was always dumb.

(5)

More than a week had passed. In spite of Katherine's going without lunches, and letting Blanche go without the milk and eggs and tonics, the rainy-day fund was getting so low that the bottom was plainly perceptible. Katherine tried to keep Blanche from knowing it; but Blanche, clairvoyantly, knew.

She told Katherine as much, one evening when the latter had returned, exhausted in body and soul from a day's new defeats; and she added sullenly that she and Katherine might as well have it out now as later. Blanche's idea of having it out was to tell Katherine that Maxwell had her beaten, that there could be no respectable future for her, that there could be no chance for Katherine while she harbored her, that she was a dead weight, heavy in her foulness, about the neck of Katherine, that she was going to remove herself from the neck of Katherine, and that, as there was nothing else for her, she was going on the street.

"Oh, *stuff!*" cried Katherine, whirling on her. Patience had broken its last thread, at last. "Blanche, do you think you help matters by talking that way? Haven't I set my mind to fight this through and beat Maxwell? Am I going to give in? And, that being so, is there any reason why you should make it any harder for me than it is already? Why are you determined to help Maxwell, against me? Is there any reason why I must feel, every minute that I'm away, that perhaps I shall get back and find you have carried out such a threat? Must I worry every minute about that, in addition to everything else? Don't you know that if you should do anything like that, it would simply mean that I'd have to give my time to hunting you and bringing you back? I've set my mind to win against Maxwell, and I'm going to win, whether you help me or not, but need you make it so hard for me? Why don't you help me, instead of hindering me?"

Blanche's eyes were downcast, turned inward as always now; but a flame of color on her sallow cheeks showed how the keen reproach had bitten into her vitals.

"I can't help," she said sullenly. "I'm done for. Maxwell has you beaten.—I'm done for."

"Oh, *no* you aren't," cried Katherine for the hundredth time, in utter exasperation. "Not unless you are willing to be! You can make good with yourself—if you would only try!"

Blanche smiled, a bitter smile. She raised her eyes, that were always dilated and black, now, as if with a state of permanent and unnatural excitement, to Katherine's face.

"Ah," she said, for the hundredth time, "but, you see, you don't know!"

"*Don't* say that again!" cried Katherine. . . . There was a pause. Then she continued deliberately, "I do know. What almost happened to you, has happened to me. . . . Only worse. No excuse like starvation. Not even—love. . . . In spite of it, I have made good. And so can you."

She did not look at Blanche. She walked over to the cheap mirror above their cheap dresser, and stood aimlessly staring into it, at the distorted image it gave back. She did not think. She dared not think. This confession was different, somehow, from the one she had made to Baldie. That one she had wanted to make; this one she had not wanted to make. Suppose that she had made it in vain? Suppose that instead of bridging the gulf between her and Blanche, she had

only lost by it what little moral ascendancy over the latter she had?

There was a rustle, a stir, faltering steps, a little cry. Katherine turned—and caught Blanche in her arms as she fell. The two stood for a moment locked in that warm, strengthening embrace. There was no longer something false between them: they were women together.

“Don’t think,” said Blanche, between swelling sobs, “that I don’t appreciate—what you have done—just now. I’m crying—for wonder—and shame! You have come down—to my level—voluntarily. In order to take me back—up—with you.” She swallowed hard. “Will I fight now—to the last gasp—to make good for you?” Blanche smiled through her tears: tears that had performed their cleansing office joyously, washing clean all the clogged channels of her being, till, above their flood, like a beacon, showed suddenly Blanche’s high, brave light again.

“I will!” said Blanche.

(6)

It seemed incredible that Maxwell should care to persecute a mere woman; or that, caring to do so, he should do it so thoroughly.

One knows of broken men who have been hounded out of cities in this subterraneous manner; losing, mysteriously and without explanation vouchsafed, any chance at earning a livelihood; but a woman—that is different. The odds are all against her, even under

normal conditions. One might think she would be below persecution.

Yet Maxwell stooped; and devoted all his sinews of power to the persecution. It was his genius for petty detail that had raised him to his position in the Christie firm; and that genius for petty detail was now focussed on the preventing of Katherine from securing a new position.

A big man might have raged and sworn, and in the end have swept the whole matter of Katherine and Blanche aside with a disgusted hand, saying, "Oh, let them go!" knowing the odds were all against them anyway. But Maxwell was not a big man. He was a small man. His venom increased as time passed, instead of diminishing. It was not stooping, for him, to fight a woman.

In a measure, even, fear stimulated his lust for revenge on the young woman who had frustrated that other lust of his, and humiliated him on top of frustration. He had always the absurd, guilty-conscienced terror of blackmail. He must crush Katherine quickly and completely, before it should occur to her to set the wheels of that Juggernaut car in motion. He must crush her quickly and completely; till he should have rendered her forever harmless to him.

(7)

Katherine, the morning after Blanche's determination to win back, went out on the hunt for some unobtrusive job that Maxwell should not have a line on.

With so much gained, Katherine did not mean that it should all be lost again for want of a job for her.

She must get a job, and get it before night.

She looked about her desperately, almost as if she expected a job, by sheer compulsion of her dominating will, to materialize out of the surrounding environment.

The something that materialized was the figure of Marie Hunt.

The last person in the world whom Katherine wished to be seen by, at that moment, was Marie Hunt.

Without a second's hesitation, without the fraction of a second's hesitation, Katherine dived into the nearest shop door. It was the door of Rosenbaum's Shoe Store. And then she stopped, trapped—for Marie, too, had turned into Rosenbaum's Shoe Store.

Marie must have seen her, Katherine thought, at first. But no, apparently not. Marie's air indicated that she was on business bent. There was only one thing for Katherine to do, and she did it. She continued straight on to the back of the store, and sat down on the opposite side of the high-backed settee from Marie, and feigned an intention to purchase a pair of new shoes.

Or was Marie on business bent? Mr. Rosenbaum, a fat, complacent little Hebrew with oily black hair, and a little, smug moustache underneath the racial nose, had hastened out of the nether regions of the store and grasped Marie fervently by the hand.

"Hello, Rosie," drawled Marie.

Mr. Rosenbaum's reply was inaudible.

"What's the matter, Rosie?" inquired Marie, with her usual happy faculty for commenting on anyone's shortcomings in appearance. "You look yellow. Who's your boot-legger? He's poisoning you!"

"Poison nothing!" cried Mr. Rosenbaum, running a distracted hand through his sleeked-back hair. "Three girls short this morning—one leaves me last week to be married, and two come down sick this morning—and what they send me up from the employment agency! Just scum——!"

Katherine's heart-beat quickened.

"Want to give me a job, Rosie?" inquired Marie, lazily.

"You know I give you a job," retorted Mr. Rosenbaum, tenderly, "any time you want it. But not in my store——"

"Well, get someone to show me a pair of pumps, will you?" interrupted Marie, brutally.

"But yes, certainly!—Miss Simons!" Rosie haled Katherine's salesgirl away from her, and sent her for pumps for Miss Hunt.

Marie sat down, back to back with Katherine, and Mr. Rosenbaum sat down beside her, and continued the conversation.

"How like Marie!" thought Katherine, hearkening to the lazy, affected voice of her old-time rival, her defeated and humiliated rival. Marie was up to her same old game. She was allowing this perfectly ineligible little Jew to make love to her so that she

could get fourteen-dollar pumps for ten. And Rosie—Rosie was taking it all too seriously.

Then came Miss Simons with the pumps; and Marie bent her attention upon them.

This was Katherine's chance to escape, and she did so, walking soft-footed and swiftly out of Rosenbaum's. She would wait till Marie got out, and then she would return, and get a job with Marie's harassed suitor. She would take advantage of his necessity, to make him take her without recommendations.

Then a sickening distrust rolled over her. She might get the job in spite of Maxwell, but how long would Maxwell remain in ignorance of her whereabouts? Maxwell's genius for sleuthing was well-nigh uncanny. And once he had discovered her refuge, how long would it be before he hounded her out of it?

For a moment she weakened; then the thought of Blanche nerved her. There was a way to get into Rosenbaum's—another way—a way that would put her in solidly, sans references, sans character, sans everything, and that would keep her there, Maxwell or no Maxwell, till she had had time to make good, and to establish herself impregnably on her own merits.

She took that way—for Blanche!

She waited in the doorway of Rosenbaum's, like a slinking panhandler dogging a charitable millionaire.

Marie came to the door. Rosie escorted her thither, bowing and all but kissing her hand. A little

smile wreathed Marie's lips as she looked from beneath lazy eyelids at him; a little contemptuous smile. She seemed to say to all observers, "See what I can do to this funny little animal!"

Then Rosie opened the door for her, and she passed languidly, arrogantly, out.

Katherine stepped up to her, and spoke to her.

Marie stopped, stared haughtily, relaxed and exclaimed, with a perceptible heightening of her interest in life and events, "Well ——! Katherine Howard! It—it *is* Katherine, isn't it?" she added, with a faint affectation of doubt whose implication was only too obvious.

Katherine flushed. "It is," she replied. "Marie, I want to ask a favor of you. You know Mr. Rosenbaum, don't you?"

Marie gave Katherine a blighting look that demanded, very plainly, "What business is that of yours?" Aloud she inquired, coolly, "Has that something to do with the favor?"

"It has," said Katherine, stung to self-possession. "Mr. Rosenbaum looked to me as if he was in love with you. Is he enough in love with you to give me a job for your sake?"

"What ever do you mean?" Marie looked Katherine's shabby figure over, carefully, from head to foot.

"Why, you *are* looking shockingly seedy, my dear!" murmured Marie.

"I mean just what I say, Marie," Katherine replied, steadily, "I need work, and I need it quickly.

Mr. Rosenbaum is short of help, and I want you to get me the job."

What a morsel of gossip for the afternoon's teatable! Kat Howard—*Kat Howard!*—begging for work in a shoe store!

Marie looked wickedly at her humbled enemy.

"Are you really so down and out, Katherine?" she inquired, softly.

For Blanche's sake! "I'm down to this," replied Katherine, steadily; and opening her pocketbook she gave Marie a glimpse of its meagre contents.

Marie opened the door. "I'll see what I can do for you," she said, in the grand manner.

The two reëntered Rosenbaum's. Rosie was flurrying around, distractedly, in his frantic effort to take care of an impatient lot of customers with an inadequate corps of saleswomen.

"Oh, Rosie!" called Marie.

Rosie turned swiftly. The crease between his eyebrows almost smoothed out; a surprised and pleased smile almost transformed his troubled face.

"Rosie," said Marie, taking delight in the situation, "here is a friend—a *dear* friend—of mine: Miss Katherine Howard. We went to school together. She has—er—come down in the world considerably since—er—we used to—er—you understand. Financial reverses—all that sort of thing, you know, Rosie. She's going to work for you. How much will you give her a week?"

"Certainly! Certainly!" cried the pleased and flattered Rosie, rubbing his hands together. "I need

girls badly just now. All that the Agencies have sent over are ——” Rosie raised his eyes to heaven, eloquently. “It is necessary that I have high-grade girls in my store for *my* patrons.” Rosie executed a gallant bow to Marie. “Just as they must have high-grade footwear, so they must have high-grade girls to wait on them.”

“How much will you pay her, Rosie?” insisted Marie.

Rosie looked uneasy. “Why, the regular pay is ——”

Marie cut in icily. “The regular ——?” She raised her eyebrows.

“Of course, for *you*, Miss Hunt, I do a little better. . . .”

Marie turned to Katherine. “Can you live on that?” she demanded brusquely.

Katherine could hardly answer. Rage at the unnecessary humiliation that Marie was putting upon her almost choked her. She swallowed hard. But she replied, steadily, with a steady smile, “I can live on it till I have made myself worth more than that to Mr. Rosenbaum.”

“If you need more help, don’t hesitate to let me know,” said Marie, again in the grand manner. And she went out.

Marie had scarcely vanished, before Rosie’s anxieties engulfed him again.

“You can take your hat right off and go to work, Miss Howard,” he directed.

Katherine did not stop for luncheon that day, in

view of the shortage of help. She worked straight on, under Rosie's approving eye. The only stop she made was a brief one, just long enough to telephone a message to Blanche: "We win!"

CHAPTER XV

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

(1)

It was eighteen months since Katherine had entered the employ of Mr. Rosenbaum. The evening was a warm one in August. In a fifty-cent moving-picture theatre that made vain boast of its temperature, the second performance of the evening was just beginning.

Vernon's Film Tours Corporation was showing a picture of the Amazon country.

In front of the screen, bristled up, like cactus, out of a vague nether dusk, rows upon rows of heads, set stiffly on attentive necks. To-night's film-tour was a thriller. From the cheaper seats, little gasps, sibilant breaths, even an occasional squeal, greeted all too life-like pictures of coiling serpents, strange spiders, sinister fungi. And suddenly, with the delightful inconsequence common only to films and nightmares, the tour was showing deep snows, ice-bound rivers, glittering expanses, sledges and furry dogs: Alaska.

"Gosh!" said Baldie. "Some country!"

"Surely is," agreed Katherine.

"Saw Tony Clarke—yes, old Tony, large as life and twice as natural—the other day. He and another fel-

low are going up next month on a hunting trip. Bear—silver fox—great hunting up in that country, Kat.”

“Going, Baldie?”

“Who? Me? Not so’s you’d notice it! What d’you think I am? Just when I’m getting in solid with the old man, working like a horse this way? Say, Kat, did you know I’m in line for another raise—a real he-man’s salary, this time? ’Nough to marry ’most anybody on? H’m! Think I’m going to take any chances, taking a three months’ vacation right now? I’ll tell the blue-eyed world I am—not!”

Katherine was silent. She was thinking that another raise, a real he-man’s salary, would inevitably mean that Baldie would again ask her to marry him. And she ought to do it, this time, or else let him go.

It wasn’t fair to him to keep him hanging on, this way. “Cut bait, fish, or get out of the boat!”—It was a favorite expression of Baldie’s, and it seemed to her that it applied very well to her. Either she ought to make up her mind to marry him, or else she ought to refuse to let him keep on seeing her. If he didn’t see her, he would soon fall in love with some nice girl and marry.

And she couldn’t marry him. She didn’t dare.

She felt very blue. . . .

It wasn’t all the problem of Baldie that made her blue. It was partly the Coöperative Apartments for working women and girls. Only that afternoon, Saturday, she had been trying to interest Angela in the Coöperative Apartments for working women and girls. And Angela was enthusiastic and eager to give

her time—would be glad to serve on a Board of Directors or as Patroness of a Benefit (if the right names could be associated with hers on the list)—couldn't give much money just now as they had just broken ground for their new home (thirty rooms; and servants' quarters over a beautiful big garage)—and they felt a little "hard up" ——

"How awfully well you are looking, Kathy dear!" she had murmured by way of changing the subject.

Katherine was looking well, which was at least partly a matter of clothes. She no longer had to put a winter rose on April's hat. She could afford a hat a season—even two hats: and a nice blouse; and a suit with good lines. For Katherine was manager of Rosenbaum's Boston Store, Rosie having at last achieved the realization of a long-cherished dream and opened up a store in New York. He was in New York four days out of six, thus leaving the conduct of affairs in Boston largely in Katherine's hands.

This substantial honor had not tumbled into her lap as a gratuity from her star. Katherine had achieved it by the quite definite application of every ounce of her native intelligence, social training, personality and will-power. She had concentrated every faculty she had on mastering the art of selling shoes. She had set her will and her wit to the selling of more shoes per week, per day, per hour, than any other saleswoman could sell, and, furthermore, to the delicate task of keeping Rosie cognizant of the fact, without her thrusting it upon him, that she was selling more

shoes per week, per day, per hour, than any other saleswoman.

Every other interest of her life had been subordinated to these aims. If luncheon conflicted with the possible sale of a pair of shoes then luncheon gave way. She went to bed early six nights a week so as to be fresh for work every morning; she took in a show religiously every Saturday night so as not to get stale; she regulated her diet to avoid every chance of a rebellious digestion or a sulky liver.

Her absolute determination to succeed disciplined her: for only by disregarding irrelevant whims and moods and conserving and directing every energy to the use of her business could she hope to make an unusual success. And an unusual success was what she was after. Therefore there must be no leaks; no dissipation of herself.

Her determination to succeed was not a mere heritage of business instinct from her father—though that instinct played, indubitably, its part. Success with shoes she saw rather as a means to an end than as an end in itself.

At first that end had been merely the safeguarding of Blanche and herself from Maxwell's spite. She must get in so solid at Rosenbaum's before her refuge was discovered, that all the Maxwells on earth could not dislodge her.

This crisis past, came a new phase. She looked on all that Maxwell had made Blanche and her suffer, and a hot flame of wrath burned up in her. She desired to punish him. To revenge herself and Blanche

and all the other girls who had suffered at his hands, by one strong blow.

"Don't hate him, Kitty!" Blanche had warned her, at this point. "It won't hurt him, and it will harm you. A spot of hate is a regular cancer in a person's soul. You cut it out! . . . After all, Kitty, we've no call to be anything but sorry for him, the poor beast! We have our health and our work, some friends, and every prospect of a future even brighter than the present. And what, in comparison, has he?"

"Money!" said Katherine, "and power to wreck any of Christie's girls he takes a fancy to."

"Much fun for him!" retorted Blanche. "The bugaboos have him scared to a frazzle every minute of his life! Scared somebody'll blackmail him! Scared his wife will divorce and disgrace him! His wife and daughters loathe everything about him but his money—he told me that once, poor beast. Pooh, Kitty! We can't get much ahead of the Bible, even in this enlightened day and generation! 'Vengeance is Mine,' saith the Lord, 'I will repay.' So far as vengeance goes, we may very well leave Maxwell in the hands of the Lord, I should say."

"No use, Blanche!" retorted Katherine. "I don't ever expect to get your approval. You're an artist—and I'm a fighter. That's the whole story of our difference in attitude toward Louis Maxwell. You philosophize about him and leave him to the Lord. I abhor him and all his works and I mean to fight him till one of us drops."

Blanche looked dubious.

"Warfare is not what it was," replied Katherine. "One man turning a crank nowadays can shell a city. I mean to turn the crank."

"Of what?"

"Well, first"—she checked it off on her fingers—"the Coöperative Apartments. I'm going to pepper the city with them before I get through. I'm going to pepper it so thick that Maxwell and his kind won't have a chance—not a chance in all the world—of getting a girl by unfair means.

"Second, publicity—public sentiment.

"Third—but we can leave that alone as yet.

"Watch me! I won't know when I'm beaten; and that kind you *can't* beat!"

Blanche kissed her.

"I may be only a good-for-nothing artist," she said, "but you shall have every cent of my rug-money to put into your fight! It may not be a drop in the bucket after your assessments of the Idle Wives of the Rich; but it will have a wonderful moral push to it, for I shall have earned it every cent myself by the labor of my own hands for the purpose. Don't tell me there isn't money—and money!"

By her rug-money, Blanche meant the returns from the sale of a rug every so often, designed and made by herself. For her dream—the dream that had drawn her to the city—was coming true, thanks to Katherine.

The latter had awakened, the morning after her encounter with Marie, in Rosenbaum's, to a realization that the barrier of pride had vanished. Whether she herself had destroyed it, as an earthquake might,

in her convulsive effort to bow a humble head before Marie for Blanche's sake; or whether it had just, like the Walls of Jericho, fallen down beneath the hand of the Lord God—at any rate, it was gone.

The light that streamed into her soul across the place where it had been showed her at once what further she must do for Blanche's sake.

Moral regeneration was all right, but the moral was rooted in the physical. Katherine must go at it from the top and the bottom simultaneously. She must, simultaneously, provide Blanche with milk and eggs and fresh air and outings, and with some form of work which would set her up, high and safe, where Maxwell could not reach her to terrorize her.

Both these provisions would take money, and as Katherine had not the money, and could not immediately earn the money, there was but one answer: she must borrow the money.

It was to Baldie, who knew all the private facts of the case, that she turned with the request that he negotiate a substantial loan for her.

Baldie, thus appealed to, had grinned.

"How'll this do, for a starter?" he had asked. And, reaching into his vest-pocket he had taken out a wallet, from which he drew a dingy and battered envelope.

In it were the very bank-bills he had placed in it that day at Dr. Abrams' hospital. He had never, he told her with a sort of boyish pride, even at the lowest ebb of his finances, borrowed one of them.

This opportune sum not only provided Blanche with milk and eggs and a weekly holiday in the country, but

also enabled her to take a first-rate course in interior decorating. From this she had been graduated with flying colors, and had got a position immediately afterward with Brinton and Blake, the decorators who are best-known as the creators of Mrs. Oliver Deacon's famous Butterfly Room.

But rugs were her dream; and for six months she had spent most of her evenings at the Library, studying books on rugs till she knew the famous rugs of the world like a habitu   of all the Bazaars from Cairo to Shanghai. With her first savings she had bought a loom and materials. By day she worked for Brinton and Blake; in the evening she worked for her dream.

And her rugs, through the efforts of Angela and Katherine's other wealthy friends, were achieving quite a vogue. She had more orders than she could possibly fill; and the "rug-money" might well prove to be quite a substantial little contribution to the fund that was to build the first Co  perative Apartments. . . .

"I hate a state of society," Katherine had said, in urging her Apartments on Angela's favorable consideration, "that deals all the cards in the pack to the wealthy libertine, and then pushes shop-girl and factory-girl in to play the game with him—a game with such stakes! My Apartments will deal one card, at least, to the girl."

She showed Angela the fascinating plans, originated by herself with all and more than the enthusiasm and ingenuity she had put into the creation of the pink-

and-gray villa, and brought into working-form by Bill Jensen, a young architect who was interested in Blanche, under the sympathetic supervision of his Chiefs in the firm.

Here were the small but economically-planned rooms, every one with direct ventilation and natural lighting; here was the standardized kitchen; here the pleasant dining-room with a few "chummy alcoves" off it to encourage beaux; here the general parlor, with a good floor for dancing, and, opening off it, half a dozen little private parlors; here the comfortable two-room suite for the "House Mother"; and here the offices of the novel Employment Bureau which was to keep tabs not only on positions and girls, but also on the characters of employers.

Angela raised her eyebrows at this last item.

"I'm afraid you will get into some libel suits, my dear," she said.

"Nothing I'd like better," replied Katherine, briskly. "Such a suit, with the attendant publicity, would do this cause more good than any amount of tepid propaganda!"

"H'm——" Angela conceded the point dubiously. "But, my dear, will it ever in the world *pay its way?*"

"Absolutely! The idea is that when my girls have work, they will pay for their lodging and board—on a coöperative basis; and when they are out of regular employment, they will work out their keep by doing the chamber-work, laundry-work, waiting on table and so forth. It can be done, and return between three

and four per cent. on the vested capital." She was prepared, in a businesslike way, to demonstrate this fact. She had financial reports from similar experiments in San Francisco and Cleveland; also estimates separately prepared by J. B. Wiltmer, the Public Accountant, Mr. Tyndall, of Tyndall and Blades, Bill's Chiefs, and Mrs. Gaynor Henry, that enterprising and successful manager of the Woman Painters' and Art Students' Club which houses, on a coöperative basis, nearly four hundred women and girls.

Angela glanced them over. "Paper profits, Kathy, I'm afraid," she murmured sadly.

Then she brightened up and said that though she could do little in a financial way, just at present, she should be more than glad to give what time and influence she had to spare —

"Coming Attractions" had monopolized the screen.

"How about it, Kat?" Baldie was whispering, huskily, in her ear. "When I get that raise—care to take a chance on me? Oh, Kat, won't you please marry me, girl?"

Katherine patted the hand of his with which he had tried to take hers. Her eyes were troubled. She was thinking of something else that Angela had said, that afternoon. She had remarked, quite casually, for she had almost forgotten that there had once been a little affair between her brother and Katherine, "Oh, by the way, Kitty—Paul's coming home next month. And this time I guess he'll stay."

"How about it, girl?"

She shook her head.

(2)

Katherine met Paolo on the street, face to face, a week or so after his arrival. She was just coming out of Rosenbaum's, on her way to the inexpensive restaurant where she usually lunched.

In spite of the fact that she had been schooling herself for this encounter, which she knew would occur, ever since Angela's remark had warned her, she felt herself turn pale. The blood fled to her heart. There was a gray whirling in her head, as if she were about to faint.

She mastered herself; bowed politely; would have passed on, but that Paolo blocked the way.

"My dear Katherine!" he exclaimed, in accents of well-simulated surprise. His old familiar head-to-foot scrutiny took her all in. She was very smart, in one of the autumn's new suits of gray tweed.

She extended her hand; forced a smile.

"Nice to see you, Paolo," she remarked, striving to make it casual, but hearing, in her own ears, that she had not quite succeeded. "When did you get back? So sorry I haven't time to chat—I'm a working woman, now, you know, with only just so many minutes for luncheon!"

Paolo waved it aside with an airy gesture that she recalled all too well. He turned. "I shall walk with you, my dear Katherine. Unfortunately, I have already lunched."

As he walked, he talked. His mellow voice rambled on and on, agreeably, conferring upon Katherine the benefit of his renewed impressions of his native city:

"These streets—Dio mio! They say the cows laid them out. One believes it! But—what an extraordinary idea for men to let their cattle lay out their cities! Enchantingly *American*, non a vero? . . ."

His pleasant, ironic monologue gave Katherine a breathing space in which to collect herself; to reassemble her self-possession, her self-respect, her pride, and her perspective.

She was not deceived by the apparent fortuitousness of the encounter. Months of attention to the art of divining the temper and minds of prospective purchasers of shoes had given Katherine considerable insight into the subtly revealing adjustments of eyelids and nostrils and chin muscles. Paolo's smooth, non-committal visage was no longer a bewildering mask to her; his plausible start and smile of pleased surprise at encountering her did not deceive her. She perceived with perfect clearness that he had sought her out and chosen the least compromising way of doing so; the way that would leave him free to follow up, or not to follow up, the meeting, as he, after seeing her, might wish.

Why had he sought her out? Was it only curiosity?

At the door of her restaurant they came, by mutual consent, to a stop. Katherine did not wish him to eat with her; and, as for Paolo, he had no desire to lunch in a place where he could not get the delicacies he liked.

Abruptly he dropped the aimless conversation.

"I may call on you?"

Katherine hesitated. "I'm very busy——" she temporized.

"Saturday evening?"

"Saturday evenings I go to the movies with Baldie Daggett."

"The bread-and-butter baby!"

She conveyed an impression of aloofness. Paolo was aware that his clever characterization had not invoked as sympathetic a response from her as of yore.

"What!" he murmured, intensely amused. "Is it to be Bread-and-Butter—in the end?"

She gazed at him rather absent-mindedly, as if she were focussing on some point beyond him. . . .

The occupant of a passing automobile stared at the couple, then bowed with a queerly vivid smile. Paolo raised his hat. It was Marie Hunt. Katherine nodded absently to her; everywhere she went, she seemed always to be running into Marie. . . .

"Sunday evening," she said, at last, slowly, her eyes fixed absently on the vanishing automobile with Marie in it, "you may call on us."

"Us!"

"Miss Viveash and I—we have an apartment together."

Paolo looked subtly discomfited. He had supposed Katherine had an apartment by herself.

"This Miss Viveash, Katherine," he murmured. "I do not doubt that she is very charming, but—can't we—meet somewhere?"

Katherine stared. "Why in the world should we?" she demanded.

And Paolo, in the face of her stare, had no answer for that.

(3)

As it turned out, however, he did not meet Blanche.

Katherine told Blanche that Paolo was going to call; and told her exactly who Paolo was; and Blanche said she did not care to meet Paolo. Blanche said she wouldn't, couldn't meet Paolo. For if she met him, she said, she couldn't shake hands with him; she should be sure to put her hands behind her; and that would make an awkward situation.

Katherine laughed at Blanche's absurd passion in the matter; but Blanche hugged Katherine, and said there was no Katherine but Katherine, and Blanche was her prophet.

As a matter of fact, said Blanche, reproachfully, why should Katherine herself care to see such a man?

Katherine said to Blanche exactly what she had been saying to herself in that instant at the door of Crosby's when she had seemed to be focussing her attention on some point beyond Paolo's head. She said that if she fought it to a finish she knew she would win; but that if she didn't fight to a finish she would keep on being—all her life long—afraid.

(4)

It did not seem, superficially, much like a battle: that gay little Sunday evening tête-à-tête in Katherine's and Blanche's delightful sitting-room, with the constant slamming of Blanche's loom in the workroom,

where Blanche, in defiance of all Sabbath evening etiquette, was at work. That was the excuse Katherine made for Blanche's non-appearance: that Blanche was rushed, night and day, and couldn't even stop to shake hands.

It was a battle, nevertheless.

Across the little sitting-room, Katherine was able, as Paolo talked, to observe him somewhat critically.

A little older, Paolo was. He could scarcely be much beyond the middle thirties yet, but the marks, the faint prophecies of deterioration were already visible in him. A little shorter-looking, a little bulkier, his girth perceptibly increased: the good things of the table were gradually having their will of him. His sleek hair, left a little longer for the purpose, was carefully brushed back to hide an incipient bald-spot. And the three flights of stairs (the elevator stopped running early on Sunday evenings) had made him breathe hard. Still, it was Paolo. The same Paolo.

His conversation, too, was the same old conversation: mostly personalities, spiced suggestively.

"You have not changed, *mia bella*. Not so much as *that!*" He flipped a bit of nothing into the air, to show how little she had changed. "A little matured, perhaps ——" Yes, it was Paolo. He looked at her, across the little room, with the slight, wise smile, grown no older; and the past was re-created; and Katherine was afraid.

She replied, "I think you will find I have changed a great deal!" And she jumped up from her chair, and wheeled a tea-wagon between them, like a barri-

cade. She went to the cupboard and got a tin of some patent delicacy, and a biscuit-jar, and a copper chafing-dish. All these she piled on the tea-wagon, between, as it were, herself and the Paolo she was afraid of.

Paolo watched her thoughtfully as she went about this business.

"So you are in love, my child!" he remarked, as she attached the chafing-dish to an electric socket, and emptied the contents of the tin into it.

Katherine glanced down at him quickly.

"What makes you think that?"

"When a charming young woman, with whom one shares a fragment of common past"—he forced her eyes with his upward gaze—"declares in a defiant tone that she has changed ——" Paolo smiled.

Then Katherine was aware of a miracle. Pressed so hard and so unfairly, she was aware that her embarrassment and her fear had dropped from her. It was as if she realized that an antagonist who stoops to unfair means is not one to be afraid of. Miraculously, she felt herself mistress of herself and of the situation.

Paolo sensed the change, too. She could see that, and it gave her added confidence.

She simulated thought.

"It hadn't occurred to me ——" she remarked. She snapped on the electric current. "No, I should hardly diagnose it as love. Mightn't it be—self-respect?"

The slight, wise smile surveyed her curiously, tolerantly; but it no longer affected her. Formerly, in all her intercourse with Paolo, he had dominated every

situation. Now, because of some change in herself, rather than any radical change in him, she dominated. She had over Paolo the advantage that the practical man of affairs, if he knows enough to exercise it, has over the male dilettante. Katherine was only manager of a shoe store; yet it gave her substance; it gave her, in her own eyes, an advantage over Paolo, who was manager of nothing at all.

"I remember ——" murmured Paolo. "You never did believe in love!"

"Still, I believe in many things now that I didn't believe in then."

"May one inquire what?" asked Paolo, preparing to be amused.

She gave the contents of the chafing-dish a stir.

"Oh—a lot of moral abstractions. You would be bored!"

"But among them love?"

"Yes, among them love."

"But how charming!"

She gave the chafing-dish another stir.

"No—I don't believe you would find it charming—or even interesting. The idea would bore you dreadfully, Paolo. Love ought to be, it seems to me, a sort of complete comradeship. The sort of thing that would result in marriage if all the marriage-laws were wiped off the face of the earth. Just because a man and woman would want to stick together through thick and thin ——" She laughed. "I'm orating; but blame yourself! You asked for it! But now let's try this, instead!" She took a tiny pâté-shell from the

biscuit-jar, righted it deftly, between fork-tines and spoon-tip, on Paolo's plate; filled it with the smoking compound from the chafing-dish, which was giving out a captivating aroma.

"A delightful oration, my dear child!" replied Paolo, his attention somewhat divided between his own words, and the plate which was to come to him. "I confess, however, that my own conception is a trifle different—Love?—Eternal Spring—the call of the bird to its mate of a month—of the youth to the maid—the instinct of field and jungle—that does *not*, alas, lead infallibly to the Hymeneal Altar ——"

But the situation was still Katherine's. He could not get back the control of it by any such cheap and flagrant allusiveness as that.

"Oh, but what's the use of orating about that kind?" She flicked the limiting adjective lightly. "Your old friend Schopenhauer, whom you used to be always quoting"—*she* dared refer to the past, now—"has done it up so thoroughly."

"But so unromantically," murmured Paolo, on the finish of a generous mouthful of Chicken à la King.

"Well—*isn't* it unromantic?" retorted Katherine; "—that kind of love?" and dismissed the subject. . . .

(5)

Before the evening was over, Paolo had to admit that her claim was based on solid fact.

"*Hai ragione*—you are right!" he admitted. "You have changed!"

He had to admit that the change had not made her less attractive. On the contrary! There was about her a sort of remoteness, a sort of delicate aloofness, a sort, one might say, of chastity or continence, that baffled, perplexed, and allured him, all at once.

He was piqued. Looking at the past, which should have predicated a quite different present, he was amazed. Could it be that she was in love after all, with young Daggett, the Bread-and-Butter Baby, to whom Saturday evenings belonged? He could not believe it, but the idea irritated him, nevertheless. Probably Daggett wanted to marry her—and she was a smart girl—she meant, probably, to rehabilitate herself that way!

The thought of Katherine, rehabilitating herself by such a desperate measure, struck a chord of pathos in Paolo's somewhat mellowed nature. Whose fault was it that Katherine needed to rehabilitate herself? His: Paolo's. Whose fault would it be if, in the effort, she committed such a sublime piece of folly as to marry Daggett? His: Paolo's. A noble impulse moved him to save Katherine from such a fate.

Paolo knew the use of a mirror; he knew that his waist-measure was getting bigger, and that the bald-spot was getting bigger, too. His waist-measure would never be any smaller (for Paolo was not one to diet) and his bald-spot would never be any smaller, either. He was rapidly approaching the age when Pan is always uncomfortably suspicious that the dryads are laughing at him. Paolo had pursued a dryad, on ship-board coming over, with a somewhat undignified ardor

in one of his girth, and everybody had heard her laugh. He was approaching the age when a bachelor wonders if he would not better have married; if he would not better marry, even yet; the age when he realizes he must insure the future by marriage since not for very much longer can he count on receiving the dryads' favors as pleasant gratuities—since not for very much longer (if he be at all sensitive, and at all vain) can he even, with peace of mind, buy them.

He was in a position to marry if he wanted to. His father, at his death, had put Paolo's share of the estate in the form of a trust-fund, so that Paolo should not be able to touch it, and should be insured an ample income all the rest of his natural life.

The usual trouble, when a bachelor reaches Paolo's age, with Paolo's limitations, and decides to marry, is that he finds he can't have it both ways. He wants a wife, but he wants her to be something of a dryad, too; and the dryads are all busy peeping at young Pans piping.

But for Paolo it was beautifully simple! Here was Katherine, whom he had wronged, of whose life he had done his best to make a wreck, looking for rehabilitation. What could he do, indeed, as an honorable man, but offer, at the first possible opportunity, which was now, to right the wrong, to salvage her life, to rehabilitate her?

And . . . *and* . . . !

He, Paolo, would have it both ways. For Katherine, if he could judge at all — . . . A peach

that is good when it is green will be better when it is ripe. . . .

He knew it was his Rubicon, but he crossed it, though with a ceremonial and somewhat fantastic gait.

"*Unica speranza del mio cuore!*" his speech concluded, with whimsical pomp. "By all the rules of serious proposals, I should get down on my knees, but ——"

He paused. There was a disconcerting expression in Katherine's eyes.

"Paolo," she said, incredulously, "are you *proposing* to me? *Marriage?*"

"I am," began Paolo, a little annoyed.

For a moment he thought she was going to laugh. For one painful moment, he seemed to hear the laughter of all the dryads in the world echoing in his ears—the sensitive ears of slightly superannuated Pan.

But Katherine did not laugh.

"I appreciate what I suppose must be your motives in asking me to marry you, Paolo," she said, quite gently. "I suppose—if you had asked me—five years ago—I should have done it. . . ."

She stared at him thoughtfully.

"But not now," she continued, at last. "Not now.

"You see," she said, "there is no reason why you should marry me, or I you, do you think?"

Paolo rose gallantly to the occasion. He replied, with the effect of a bow, "I permitted myself the hope ——"

As Katherine receded from him, growing more and more remote, certain memories of her in other as-

pects drew nearer and nearer, growing more and more warm and palpable, more and more alluring. He leaned suddenly across the little table that separated them. His voice was vibrant and imperative. The five years dropped from him. In spite of glimmering bald-spot and rounding waist-coat, he possessed once more, by the quality that was his, the illusion of entire desirability, the irresistible appeal of passion and of pain.

"I hoped," he said, "that you might love me—still."

Katherine looked at him. The years had dropped magically away. He was Paolo, Paolo the entirely desirable, his youth, his slenderness, his magnetic power renewed by the illusion. And yet there was, somewhere, a change. . . . She located it in herself.

"No, Paolo," she said, "I don't love you. I'm sorry."

There was a pause—just a hair's breadth too long.

He withdrew stiffly. He misunderstood. He thought it was the waist-measure and the bald-spot. He rose.

Katherine rose, too. She held out her hand.

"I'm sorry, Paolo," she repeated.

"Don't be sorry," said Paolo, with a smile. Already he had a breath-taking sense of narrow, very narrow escape. He was, miraculously, still free. Free to pipe his way, adown the long vista of the years, on a gilded pipe. And though now and then a foolish dryad might titter, to a wise dryad the piping

of an elderly Pan on a golden pipe is sweeter than youth's sweetest flutings through the hollowed reeds. . . .

"I shall see you again?" he asked, indecisively.

"What's the use?" replied Katherine, quite bluntly.

"True. . . ." What was the use, since what had been was no more? . . . Besides, he perceived, with the insight of a truly chivalrous nature, that she wished to be left unembarrassed by encounters with him, in the work of reconstructing her life. . . .

"Then—addio!" . . . With a little Italian, a touch of pensive sadness, a slight, lingering pressure of her hand, he achieved, at last, the effective exit—so different from the time that Angela and his mother had bundled him unceremoniously out of the scene. . . .

(6)

On his way down-stairs, Paolo encountered Baldie coming up, three steps at a time. Baldie was in a hurry, for he knew it was late for a call. The conviction had been growing on him all the evening that he had to see Katherine. His call of the evening before had been a fiasco. He and Katherine had both been constrained, awkward, forced, with each other. Their sense of splendid spontaneous comradeship had vanished, and their strainings after it had only made its absence more apparent.

There was a shadow between them: the shadow of Paul Grayson.

Katherine wanted to bring up the subject—to men-

tion, rather casually, that she had seen him—that tomorrow evening she was going to have him here and fight the thing out to a definite conclusion—and that she expected to win. But somehow she couldn't seem to open the topic.

Baldie, unknown to Katherine, wanted to broach the same subject. He was trying, all the evening, to get to the point of telling Katherine that Marie Hunt had told him that she had seen Katherine and Paolo lunching together.

Of course he knew it wasn't true. Marie was such a liar—— And if it was true, of course there was some explanation. Not that he wanted any explanation. He wanted to bring the subject up, not to hear any explanation, but to assure Kat of his complete confidence in her and of his wish to trust without explanations. The fear that she would misunderstand—would think he was asking for the explanations he didn't want—held him back.

So they had talked on and on, of irrelevant things, miserably, till Baldie, an hour earlier than his wont, had gone abruptly. And all to-day he had been miserable, till now, just at bedtime, he had recaptured the mood of perfect, unafraid frankness that usually characterized his and Katherine's friendship. There would be only a moment—but he felt that in that moment could be said all that needed to be said to erase the shadow of Paolo from between him and Kat. . . .

Paolo, emerging from Katherine's suite, after his narrow and undeserved escape, was looking well

pleased with himself. He emanated an atmosphere of triumph, of self-complacence, of amorous reminiscence. As he greeted Baldie, offhand, he slid a slight, quizzical smile over the Bread-and-Butter Baby (though he was forced to envy him the wind that could take him up three flights of stairs two steps at a time). Baldie stopped so short he almost lost his balance; he recovered himself, wheeled, his fists clenching automatically. But Paolo, all unaware, was already half a flight down, tripping jauntily on, smiling reminiscently. Baldie gathered himself to make the intervening space in one leap—then the heart went out of him. Luncheon the other day—to-night the evening—there could be only one explanation: Katherine still cared.

CHAPTER XVI

ALPHA AND OMEGA

(I)

BIRMINGHAM, Massachusetts, is an important industrial center which would seem as large as it is, were it not dwarfed by its proximity to Boston. Boston, however, self-complacent giant as it is, would go barefoot, so to speak, were it not for Birmingham; and so, indeed, would Chicago and Philadelphia and New York; for in Birmingham, in addition to the tons of cutlery and buttons for which it is famous, are made many of the millions of shoes worn in Boston and Chicago and Philadelphia and New York. The vast Ames Daggett factory is in Birmingham; and the Ames Daggett footwear treads the soil of these United States all the way from Atlantic City to Long Beach.

Now the Ames Daggett factory has not attained its present proportions and importance without mental alertness somewhere at its center. This mental alertness is in the head of Ames Daggett himself. Ames Daggett does not need to maintain a resident Efficiency Engineer in his plant, because he is his own Efficiency Engineer. Now one of the things he is always on the alert about, is the reduction of his labor turnover; and it would be interesting to consider the various schemes he has put into operation by which the labor turnover has been reduced from a very high per cent.

to a very low one, but that is not part of the story. Another of his hobbies is the efficiency of the individual worker—the adaptation of the individual worker to the individual job, and his keeping of himself fit for a maximum of individual production five-and-a-half days a week—and a part of this is part of the story.

During the war, a great many men left the plant, and their places were filled by women and girls. At the close of the war, many of the men came back to their jobs, and many of the women and girls went home to domestic jobs; but enough of them remained to constitute a problem. Here they were, several hundred of them, of all ages from sixteen to sixty, of all types, all nationalities, all degrees of education, and of widely varying social backgrounds. Some were widows, some were married women with grown children, some with young children, some childless; the majority of them were unmarried, and young. They came to work in georgette crêpe and French heels, in broken shoes and rags. They came undernourished and weak from too little food, and they came dull and headachy from the wrong kind of food. They came heavy with sleep from broken nights or late nights. Yet they were quick workers, deft, teachable, and, on the whole, more conscientious than the men. What might they not be if they were properly clad, properly nourished, properly rested, with their domestic worries and complications properly straightened out?

“I don’t want one of your brisk, square-toed, trained Welfare Workers,” Ames Daggett had said,

irritably. "One of these bright young women who will classify my girls as 'types'—and get about as much human response as you get from a type. I want a sort of worldly person—young, attractive-looking, smart, lots of style. The kind that the girls will copy her clothes. These girls wear their murderous high heels and cobweb hosiery and frail expensive dresses because they think that's smart. They don't understand that what's smart for afternoon tea isn't smart for business. You can't make 'em do different by preaching hygiene and thrift at 'em. They're human, same as our own daughters. But let 'em see that the smart thing for business-wear is the low-heeled shoe and the tailored suit or dress, and you won't have to preach.

"But then I want one who's shrewd, in addition. Size a girl up, you know; know how to get at this one and that one. Forceful, genuine, and friendly, all at once. And one that's got the right ideas about things without being prudish. A darned good saleswoman into the bargain: one that can sell 'em virtue, so to speak, rather than trying to choke it down their throats like medicine. You get my idea."

"Well, I know exactly the person you want," spoke up one of the salesmen. "Young enough—she'll never see twenty again, but then again it'll be quite some time, I imagine, before she'll see thirty. Smart—I'll tell the world. Right up to the minute, every day, in every way. Darned easy to look at, too, aside from that. And a saleswoman. Say! That girl's the smartest kind: she could sell you most anything, but

she'd rather never sell you a cent's worth than sell you something you don't want. Want to know where you can find her, Mr. Daggett?"

"Is she straight?"

"Well, I'm a darned poor judge of character if she isn't."

"Where is she?"

"Well, for the love of Mike don't tell him I put you wise to her—she's down at Rosenbaum's; she's his Boston manager; name's Howard—Miss Howard."

(2)

So it came about that Ames Daggett, having fixed up matters amicably with Rosie, approached Katherine with a proposition that she should enter his plant as "Secretary of the Department of Women"—a vague title designed to afford scope within it for whatever duties might develop.

The name "Miss Howard"—even "Katherine Howard"—awakened only a dim echo in Ames Daggett's mind, and the echo went unnoticed. He had never been the confidant of his son Baldie.

As for Katherine, she kept her own counsel. For the matter of that, Baldie's name seldom passed her lips at any time. He had dealt her a more cruel hurt than she had ever received in her life from any other hand; and the end of the story had been tragedy.

It was of these strange and totally unforeseen events—unforeseen twenty-four hours before the first of the chain occurred—that Katherine was thinking, one mid-December evening, as she sat alone in her office in the

Administration Building of the Daggett plant. The office force was gone. The stenographers' desks were closed and silent. The waiting-room was empty and dark. Outside, in the white dusk of a snowy evening, Market Street was surging with before-Christmas crowds, which were struggling ineffectually to disgorge themselves via the suburban trolleys. Inside, a single electric lamp, green-shaded, cast its light down in a circle, on a flat-topped desk littered with papers, and on the dark bent head of Katherine; on the white cuffs of her trim dark serge dress, and on her capable hands bringing order out of the paper chaos before her.

The evening was the tag-end of an unusually hard day—how hard and how busy a day could be seen from the fact that the morning paper still lay at one side, neatly folded as it had been when delivered. Around it and on top of it lay a number of more significant pieces of printed matter which there had not been time to look over during the day, and which now must be examined and sorted, either into the waste-basket or into a pile ready for the filing-clerk, before another day should begin. Here were two or three reports from the Department of Labor at Washington—a new United States Employment Bulletin—several communications from Chambers of Commerce—a sheet of printed statistics—a form letter from the State Division Chairman of the Woman's Committee of National Defense—a copy to be O. K.'d of the mid-month report from her office—a wire basket of correspondence to be signed—last of all, a square violet

envelope, still sealed, and adorned, on the flap, with a Red Cross stamp.

Over this envelope, Katherine frowned. She glanced at her watch: six-twenty. She broke the seal, and drew the letter from the envelope. It was delicately written, with wide erratic margins, and it sprawled luxuriously over several sheets of expensive paper.

“*Dreamwolde, December sixteen.*”

“DEAREST KATHERINE:

“You got my invitation to the reception, I’m sure, and I hope you have already made up your mind to come. But in case you haven’t yet done so, this is just a wee note to beg you to be sure and come. I know you are a *terribly busy* and *important* person, but I shall be *heart-broken* if you don’t make a point of it this time. You know it is our second anniversary, beside being our housewarming.

“The floral decorations are going to be beautiful. Cavendar is doing them, and really he is outdoing himself for us. The feature is to be what he calls *The Arch of Love Triumphant*, an arch of dark crimson jack roses with masses of those dark blue-purple Russian violets, breaking into a sort of foam of callalilies at the top. It’s to be in the center of the big drawing-room, and there we shall stand, under it, to receive. And—sh!—it is to *cost* fifteen hundred dollars! It seems almost wicked to spend so much money in these times, doesn’t it, on anything so perishable—and yet, of course, it benefits so many working people ——”

Katherine raised her eyes, with a kind of wondering pity in them. Bettina had had the soliciting of Angela, who was in her district, for the Christmas

Red Cross drive; and Bettina had told Katherine, in confidence, that Angela's check had been drawn for twenty-five dollars. Twenty-five dollars!—And fifteen hundred for the glorifying, in one small detail, of Angela's one-night display! Surely there was a lack of beautiful proportion here in Angela's temple of life which she was building!

Yet who was to blame?

Not Angela, wholly.

The curved surface of a bubble distorts the face of life which it reflects, jumbling its images into a brilliant and colorful unreality. Why blame poor Angela, a daughter of the bubble, for mistaking distortions for life's standard of beauty—and building accordingly?

"Now *do* come, Kitty—I shall expect you! Don't forget—to-morrow night—nine o'clock—there'll be dancing.

"Lovingly as ever,
"ANGELA."

A faint whiff of fragrance—the same fragrance which had always appertained to Angela and all her dainty belongings—came to Katherine's nostrils, as she slid the violet sheets back into their envelope. Odors are potent. To her dying day, that subtle scent would turn Katherine sick and faint. For Angela had added a postscript.

"P. S. Isn't it frightful about Baldie? They have given up the search."

With hands that trembled, Katherine snatched up

the unopened newspaper, and saw the head-lines: "Search for multi-millionaire's son given up. Companions return from far northwest."

Katherine dropped her head in her hands. The final news was no surprise to her. She had known that this would be the end, months before, when she received the last word she had ever had from Baldie.

It had come to her that Monday morning after the Sunday evening when she settled the question of Paolo. She had waked, that morning, full of a great and joyous thankfulness. She could hardly wait to see Baldie, to tell him that she had faced the test and come out triumphant, that Paolo had gone out of her life forever, that the past had no ghosts she feared any longer, that her answer to his question need no longer be, "I don't dare"; that it could be a glad, "I will." And then, instead of Baldie, had come Baldie's note.

It was most unlike Baldie's usual correspondence, which had always been amusingly stilted and school-boyish. This note lived and breathed. It had been flung off flaming hot from the live coals of Baldie's torture. It had no beginning, no ending.

"For God's sake, Kat, if you care for him, marry him. I am going with Tony's hunting-party and I hope to God I never come back."

No signature, even. And before her wounded pride—her pride that said Baldie had condemned her unheard—had healed, he was gone.

She had humbled herself sufficiently to write him one letter—a letter that endeavored stiffly to tell him

what no letter could tell. She had had no reply. If he had ever received it, it had failed to convey her message. The first news that reached her was the news that Baldie had become separated from the rest of the hunting-party and had been lost, far up in the northern snow-country, miles from any settlement. There was no shock of surprise in the news for Katherine.

“I hope to God I never come back.”

So—he was not coming back. She could have told them that the long heart-breaking search, financed by Ames Daggett, would be in vain. . . .

And she had done it. She had killed him. She had killed Baldie.

“I killed him five years ago,” she thought to herself.

She was both amazed and terrified at tracing the spreading, multiplying consequences of that one small illicit act of so long ago. It had for so long a time been sterile of consequence. . . .

Or had it really been sterile? Had it not really had only the semblance of sterility?

Had it not really (when one looked attentively at the chain of events) begun to develop consequences almost immediately—in the misery of Davis Vaughn?

Hadn't its consequences germinated and spread like an unwholesome fungus in her life, choking out what good impulses she had had? Landing her, at last, after a queer, abortive attempt at a pagan morality, in marsh-mud that might well have smothered her had she had just a little less vital resistance?

Hadn't moral disease, scaling off her, really infected Blanche? Wasn't it really in those sparkling, ironic picturings of the bubble-world to Blanche, that the trouble (Blanche's trouble) had begun? Not so much in anything wrong that Katherine had said, but just in her unconscious inevitable attitude toward the sort of life whose key-note had been a cynical materialism—sensualism?

And it had ended in wrecking two lives: Baldie's—and her own.

She looked around her office, and a sudden fierce distaste for all that it represented possessed her.

What was it all for—her long hours of work, her weariness, her self-denial? She had had no pleasures for three years. She had kept herself for her work. She had been a sort of ascetic. She had fought the good fight, and won it. To what end?

That she might, in spite of all, see Baldie go to his death because of her.

She flung out her arms in a gesture of passionate protest. She must forget!

The violet envelope, with its faint subtle scent, tempted her.

Soberly considered, she knew that Angela's party was sinful, for all waste is sinful. The windows of the thirty rooms of Dreamwolde would be pouring a wasteful effulgence out into the night; the thirty rooms themselves, involving as they did not only the materials and labor of their original construction and furnishing, but also daily heat and service, were an extravagance, at least twenty of them being super-

fluous for the homely comfort—even for the luxurious comfort—of a family the size of Angela's; hundreds of dollars' worth of food, broken and whole, would be thrown out at the close of the party; thousands of dollars were to wither futilely in the heat on walls and casements and balustrades and Triumphal Arch of Love.

And the extravagance of the guests would match the extravagance of the function. Hundreds of dollars would have been spent on the manicuring and massaging and painting and coiffing of women who would have looked more natural, human, genuine and pleasing to an unperverted taste if they had been simply sweet and clean and neat. Hundreds of thousands of dollars would have been spent on elaborate gowns, many of which would be worn once and then handed down to servants or poor relatives for whom they would be unsuitable. Millions of dollars in the year past would have been spent in padding and perfuming the lives of the women who wore these gowns, most of whom, except for a little piffling dab at charities, were totally unproductive: They did not change raw materials into cooked food; they did not change dirt and disorder into cleanly tidiness; they did not change whole cloth into clothes; they did not take care of their own children (if they had any); they did not do any of the world's work—did not push the levers that cut the vamps of the world's shoes or feed the paper onto the rollers that publish the world's news—did not even hoist the elevators that carry the world's business up and down high buildings; they did not

contribute anything of value to the world's beauty—neither writings nor paintings nor statues nor buildings nor music; they did not contribute anything to the world's store of truth, neither by research nor scientific experiment.

And yet ——

She glanced at her wrist-watch. A quarter past seven. If she hurried, she could still get her dinner, bathe and dress and make the nine-thirty express into Boston. Should she go? There would be confetti and balloons and paper streamers and laughter and congratulations and music and dancing; dainty things to eat. If she could but leave behind her the memory of toiling women and girls, hungry for a normal allowance of the pleasure and beauty with which Angela and her guests were surfeited, she would be able to feast her eyes ravenously on clouds of jeweled chiffon, gleaming flesh, wonderful color-symphonies, bowers of blossom and satin. She might, for a little while, *forget*.

Then, in imagination there arose before her the Arch of Love Triumphant, roses and violets foaming into lilies along its crest. . . .

And suddenly Katherine dropped her head on her arms.

“Oh, Baldie! Oh, Baldie!” she whispered.

(3)

Winter passed and spring came and the days grew warm toward summer.

Katherine had not gone to Angela's party, or to any other parties. She had found a better way of forgetting. That was to work ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day—and then sleep. Toward summer, however, the catch in this scheme became apparent. She had, all unnoted, been losing weight for several months. She had a driven feeling, and a jaded look, with an anxious roll to the eye, like a gallant horse that has been ridden too long on the spur. She began to feel as tired when she got up in the morning as she was when she went to bed at night; and it was soon after this that she began to dream.

They came, the dreams, night after night, pressing in on her, wearing her out. They were all the same type of dream. Resolutely, all day long, she kept from thinking of Baldie by putting her mind assiduously on the problems of Flossie and Olga, Sonya and Tzvetana, Mrs. Mikelovitch and Mrs. Sudamak. But at night, when her will was off guard, thoughts of Baldie took possession of her mind and were distorted there into horrible shapes.

She saw him far away, floundering in deep drifts of snow, throwing up an arm for help as he fell. . . . Sometimes she saw him close by, ghastly, emaciated, silent as in death, with open, glassy eyes. And there would be Paolo, leering. . . . Sometimes she would awake with a start, to hear the echo of a frightful cry ringing in her ears. . . .

And soon she began to lie in a sort of stupor, half-dreaming, half-imagining worse horrors than she ever saw in her sleep. . . .

But one night in May she dreamed her last dream of him.

She was sitting late at her desk, as had become her custom. Drowsiness had stolen on her, unaware. Her head sank forward, pillowed on her arms, which rested on her desk. The shaded lamp above her head cast its bright circle of light down upon her dark hair, the white collar of her blouse, her shoulders, raised arms, and hands lying supine. All outside the bright circle was in twilight—the little office, the wood-and-glass partitions, the big outer office with the empty typewriter desks. Though she was resting so, with her eyes shut, she saw the door of the outer office open, and a stranger came in. It was a gaunt, grim stranger, and the sight of him frightened her. He came toward her, swiftly, through the empty outer office. He crossed the threshold of her door. He looked at her out of sunken eyes. She did not know him, and she felt a terror of him.

He said, "Kat! Kat! Don't you know me?"

She rose up from her chair as if his eyes drew her up. She took a step toward him.

And suddenly she screamed.

It was no dream. Baldie had come back; alive; in the flesh.

(4)

"I had to go, Kat. I couldn't bear it. I didn't want to come back. I meant never to come back."

The twilight of the office enfolded them gently, making confidences easy.

Baldie continued: "It was easy enough to manage—the getting lost from the rest of them. Call it suicide, if you like. I didn't think that far ahead. I only knew I wanted to get away from everybody I had ever known, and never see any of them again. Then when I cooled down, realized I was really irrevocably lost, and that death was staring me in the face—I was glad. Yes! Glad!"

On the desk, by which they were sitting, within the sharp perimeter of the bright circle of light, lay one of Baldie's hands, thin, bony, ridged with tendons. Katherine laid her own hands, in a passion of tenderness, over it, hiding the pathos of its emaciation from her eyes.

Baldie went on: "Then this old fellow, this trapper that I told you about, he found me. . . .

"Well, those four months that I was snowed in with him in his camp, no means of communication at all with the outside world, gave me lots of time to think, Kat. I realized I had been a fool. I ought to have waited and stood by. All the more if you thought you cared for *him*; if you had any mistaken idea you ought to marry him. I thought about lots of things—those four months. Nothing to do most of the time *but* think. . . .

"I said to myself, if I ever got back to civilization, I'd hit for home. I'd see you at least once. If you had bitter medicine for me, I'd take it like a man. . . ."

He smiled happily at her, but she averted her eyes to hide the pitiful mist that clouded them. The sunken

hollows of Baldie's kind blue eyes, the shadows between cheek-bone and jaw-bone of Baldie's face, once so round and boyish, smote her heart.

"But it's over now, my dear, my dear," she whispered. "You have come back."

"And you'll marry me now, girl."

"Yes, Baldie."

"When?"

"Just as soon as I can get someone trained in to take charge of my work here."

"I've waited a long time for you, girl," pleaded Baldie.

Katherine looked troubled. "I'm sorry, dear," she said, hesitatingly. "It's my cursed sense of responsibility. Goodness knows, a sense of responsibility was not easy for me to achieve. But I had to get one in order to pull through. Without it, I would never have got to be manager of Rosie's—and of course your father would never have chosen me for this job here.

"And now I can't, all in a minute, get rid of it! You see it's really a sense of honor, you may say—the sort of honor a woman is not supposed or desired to have—that makes me feel that I can't leave my job in the lurch. It's a big, expensive experiment—this organization of the women of the plant into an intelligent, loyal group. It's a fine, forward-looking experiment. It would be a shame if it should fail. I wouldn't want to be the one that jeopardized its success. You see, I've learned a good deal in the months I've been here. My successor ought not to

have to start where I did. She ought to start where I leave off. That means that I ought to stand by till they find just the person they want, and then I ought to train her in. And yet—— Oh, Baldie, my dear, my dear—down deep, nobody, honor nor job nor anything, matters with me just now but you.”

She paused.

“I love you so, Baldie,” she said; and bowed her head on their clasped hands.

Baldie looked down on her with a curious expression in his sunken blue eyes.

“That’s the last stroke to making a man of me, Kat. You make me realize what an irresponsible trick it was for me to throw up the sponge and skip out—lay down on my job—and just when my dad was beginning to have some hopes of me, too. I never thought of it from that angle before. No, Kat, don’t you go back on that sense of responsibility. If more women had a sense of business honor, there’d be more men with a real respect for womanhood. You stick by your job, Kat. I’ll wait.”

Katherine lifted her head.

“Do you suppose you can get a license at this hour?” she asked, thoughtfully. “I think I could take three days off, without wrecking the plant!”

She jumped up.

“Beat it, old dear, as we say in the Department of Women!”

Baldie looked pathetically bewildered.

She dropped a kiss on the top of his head.

“A license and a parson are the only necessities,

darlint," she said, gravely, "though your dad's blessing would be a very nice addition. He and I are quite friends, Baldie."

"But Kat ——!"

"We'll have to wait a little while for our honeymoon and our nest-building, that's all. It may not be the ideal way, but I've noticed that one is very seldom able to do anything in the ideal way in this old world."

"You mean ——?" cried Baldie, with a tone that was very like the tone of the Baldie of pre-Alaska days.

"I do!" cried Katherine.

Baldie sprang up, still half-incredulous.

"We're ——?"

"Getting married! If you hurry!"

"If —— Oh, girl! Watch me break the speed-record!"

(5)

Two hours later, the midnight local for Boston stopped at Birmingham and was boarded by an inconspicuous pair—a gaunt young man in shabby clothes, and a young woman in a plain dark suit.

The local was crowded, for there had been some sort of a celebration at the Casino at Lake Winnetaukee, the station above, and this was the last train down.

Katherine and Baldie were unable to find seats together. Katherine sat in with an elderly woman in a black head-scarf; Baldie sat across the aisle, two seats forward, and facing the coach. They were too

far apart to talk; too far even to exchange glances. Baldie folded his arms across his chest—a habit which, Katherine sensed, he had formed in the old trapper's camp. His face settled into a sort of grim patience. So he must have looked, many and many a day, while, helpless to hurry it by even a day, he waited for the long winter to come to its end. With this look he must have endured the rigors of that unaccustomed life—the camp-chores, the hard bunk, the rude fare, the bitter cold repelled with difficulty, the lonesomeness, the inactivity, the uncertainties of the future. It wrung her heart—that look. But once, when she caught his eye, he smiled, and she saw that it was, after all, a mask. He had been thinking happy thoughts beneath it.

Yet the facial habit must have a corresponding mental habit. She wondered. It was odd to be sitting so near Baldie, and yet so far away. They were married; he was her husband; and yet, in every vital way, they were strangers. How much he had been through, in these last six months, of which she knew nothing! How much he had experienced! How much of it must have become a part of him, altering him vitally. How much there must be—tricks of manner, like this folding of the arms and slipping into the mask of grim patience—tricks of thought and feeling—that she would have to learn.

For the matter of that, she, too, had changed. She thought back (more than across the years, it seemed to her: into a different world, it seemed) and saw the super-girl of Montescue's. Were that girl and she

really the same person? Was there anything at all of that girl left in her? Was the figure of the Potter and the Mould a good one? Was she simply that clay re-shaped? Or had she little by little, sluffed off that clay—she, an essential something within the clay—and little by little, taken on new?

Intent on this line of introspective speculation, and all the multiplying queries which branched out of it, Katherine, who had had little leisure for introspection in the last three years, lost all reckoning of time. It was with a start that she aroused herself to find her fellow-passengers surging into the aisle. Baldie was beside her. His hand was touching her arm.

She looked up at him. His kind blue eyes smiled down at her. No, he was no stranger. How could she have thought so? He might have taken on strange garments, strange lineaments, unfamiliar postures, but the old essential Baldie was the same.

Perhaps it was the same with her. Perhaps Baldie, looking at her, saw the same Katherine he had seen five years ago, against the old brick wall and ever-green hedge of Montescue's on Class-Day. Perhaps he alone, in those days, had seen her; as only the flower-lover sees, in the hard green bud, the rose.

She stood up. Baldie's arm, doubtless glad of the excuse, went around her, drawing her into the aisle and protecting her from the pressure of the pushing crowd.

A conductor, belatedly, put his head in at the door of the coach: "North Station! Enda the rout!"

But it was not the end, by any means, thought Kath-

erine. It was the beginning. She and Baldie had just become themselves. They—the real Baldie and the real Katherine—had only just finished coming into existence. Only now were they ready to take their true places in the world; to make their contributions to it. Life was all ahead of them. It was not the “enda the rout.” It was the beginning—the very beginning.

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